VITAL CONNECTIONS



SELF, SOCIETY, GOD

Perspectives on Swadhyaya

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

RAJ KRISHAN SRIVASTAVA

VITAL CONNECTIONS

VITAL CONNECTIONS:

SELF, SOCIETY, GOD

PERSPECTIVES ON SWADHYAYA

Edited with an Introduction by

RAJ KRISHAN SRIVASTAVA

First edition, 1998

Published by Weatherhill, Inc., of New York and Tokyo,
with editorial offices at 568 Broadway, Suite 705, New York, N.Y. 10012

Printed and bound in the U.S.A.

ISBN 0–8348–0408–5 (paperback)
ISBN 0–8348–0407–7 (cloth)

CONTENTS

Preface

An Editorial Introduction to the Essays

This volume brings together the views of a community of scholars and observers who have been exposed to the philosophy of *Swadhyaya* and the way swadhyayees have absorbed it in their lives. Till recently the outside world knew little about the Swadhyaya phenomenon. Of late there has been some awareness about its driving force and founder, Pandurang Shastri Athavale, endearingly addressed as Dada, and about the uniqueness of Swadhyaya in terms of its scale, reach and methodology. In a sense this volume represents the emergence of scholarship on Swadhyaya.

The essays in this volume have grown out of some recent encounters between the authors and the swadhyayees in their particular locales. The idea of such meetings and dialogues germinated during the Centenary Parliament of World's Religions held in Chicago, August–September 1993. The Swadhyaya *parivar* (family) was represented by Mrs. Jayashree Talwalkar, a dynamic and frontline activist of Swadhyaya. She also happens to be Dada's daughter. Her address at the Parliament's Plenary and a major presentation aroused considerable curiosity. Many participants told Didi, as she is affectionately called, of their desire to see the transformative learning initiated by Swadhyaya in India.

It took more than a year to organize the first of such visits, of which I was a part. It coincided with the annual celebration of Human Dignity Day observed by the swadhyayees. Preceded by a week-long field trip to various sites, the group assembled in Mumbai (Bombay) on December 19-20, 1994 for a discussion among themselves and later an open dialogue with the swadhyayees. The discussants represented a cross-section of disciplines and were of impeccable humanist cast. Of the twenty-four discussants, thirteen were from the West and eleven were from India and Asia. At the very outset, the discussion was located in a wider, universal context. It enabled the discussants to grapple with issues of plurality, diversity, and unity, and the attendant problems of politics, leadership, change, and the cultural awareness of Swadhyaya. Therefore, the discussants looked at Swadhyaya from various angles—philosophy, ideology, comparative religions, movements, and social intervention—as well as at its stand on gender issues, rights, civil society, sustainable development, universality, etc.

At the end of the proceedings, several panelists developed a feeling that they might have something to say to those interested to know about Swadhyaya. A call for papers was natural. I took the initiative by inviting them and a few others who, I had learned, had also encountered Swadhyaya briefly or at some length. I asked them to reflect, evaluate and describe Swadhyaya and what they thought of it. Most of the essays here were written expressly for this volume, except for a few that have been derived from articles that have appeared elsewhere.

These essays show a range of approaches towards Swadhyaya. They offer a sense of possibility. They are not tied together in any deliberate design, yet they have much in common. For one thing, the field observations were carried out in a particular geographical location, though at different sites; and most of these site visits occurred between 1994 and 1996. The authors are concerned as much with the formal aspects of Swadhyaya as with its informal processes.

This volume tends to shift continuously from the views of the insiders to those of the outsiders, that is, the essays frequently alternate

between those penned by Indian authors and those written by authors from outside India. It is like a continuous adjustment of the microscope lens. Each person sees the same phenomenon at a certain point in history, but describes it in different ways, and expresses different hopes, fears, and prophecies. Indeed, truth is too complex to be contained in either/or polarities.

I have deliberately avoided referring to individual essays. Any attempt to summarize them for the readers would have been an oversimplification. What I do below is to make an effort to present the common thread that links all these essays.

Swadhyaya is so atypical that to describe it as a movement is either to miss its essence or to make it part of an inappropriate discourse. Swadhyaya is about human transformation. It refers to self-knowledge, a knowledge that links "self" to divinity. It is rooted in the idea that God is within us, near us and works with us. We must be grateful to God. The best way to express our gratitude is through the offering of our "efficiency" to God as a devotional act. This goes on to build "impersonal wealth" that belongs to God but which is to be used for His children. Thus devotion is and can be used as a social force.

The spiritual commitments of swadhyayees are self-incurred, and once made, they begin to manifest in the improved quality of their lives—social, cultural and economic. Swadhyaya provides the auspices for structural changes. These changes are in sharp contrast to secular models of change, growth, modernization and civil society. Swadhyaya does not exhaust itself in working towards structural change; it renews itself by relating human beings to human beings and heritage to contemporary situations. It absorbs or rejects influences to ensure harmony at all levels, between "Self" and the "Divine," "Self" and society, the immediate and the eternal. In short, Swadhyaya is seen as a nonsectarian approach to spirituality, in which external authority is replaced by internal feeling, and in which people connect with each other rather than insulate from each other. Further, the essayists find that Swadhyaya seeks a convergence in attitudes rather than a convergence of beliefs and cultures.

There are several essayists who celebrate the success of Swadhyaya, but also project their temporal fears based on their experience and reading of movements in other parts of the world. These fears range from uneasiness on account of the immanent nature of the divine in Swadhyaya to the likelihood of generational conflicts and threats from the state and permissive politics. To all these fears, there are no simple answers. What can be said is that if Swadhyaya's goals are fine, processes are fine, and indicators are fine, why, then, the question: "What may it come to?" However, these come from some of the more sensitive minds and the swadhyayees must carefully listen to these voices of wisdom.

The collection of these essays begins with the transcript of a talk given by Dada at the beginning of the Mumbai dialogues in December 1994. There can be no better key to unlock the ideas behind Swadhyaya than the views of Dada. "Dada's Vision" is preceded by a comprehensive introduction which is intended to convey various aspects of Swadhyaya and to facilitate the understanding of its message.

In the preparation of this book I have incurred many debts, some of which I want to acknowledge. My sincere appreciation goes to Bhuwan Chandra and K. Hilal for helping me with the initial draft of the manuscript, and to Sharon Nettles for her help in finalizing the manuscript through her unobtrusive editorial skills.

I am indebted to D. L. Sheth, my colleague, for many engaging discussions on Swadhyaya over the years. These have helped me to finalize my ideas and to improve my presentation. I have also gained much from Ramashray Roy, who was my colleague in the initial stage of my research interest in Swadhyaya.

Finally, I wish to express my deepest reverence for and gratitude to Dada, whose openness, love for original thinking and breadth of vision had brought the authors together; to Didi, who has inherited the qualities of head and heart from Dada and whose exceptional organizational skills have become very evident; to the mota bhais (particularly Hemraj Asher, Ramdas Gandhi, the two Mahadevias, Dashrath and Surendra, Baldev Mehra, Mahesh Shah, Mahadev Mangela, and the two Patels, Jitendra and Suresh) who made these

field trips so comfortable at a considerable discomfort to themselves; and finally to the authors of these essays for the esprit de corps shown by them and their commitment to a better world, both of which go beyond the immediate task of putting a book together.

R.K. SRIVASTAVA

HOLI
DELHI, MARCH 24, 1997

VITAL CONNECTIONS

Swadhyaya: An Introduction

R.K. Srivastava

Mankind finds itself today in an all-encompassing crisis. Awareness of this crisis is now part of global consciousness. The credit for heightening human consciousness goes to diverse groups and individuals—radicals, romantics, humanists, anarchists, idealists, pacifists, preservationists, and activists of cultural choices, gender and rights. Their sustained drive for consciousness raising and alarming prophecies have stimulated receptive minds everywhere.

However, what is clearly a deep-rooted spiritual crisis is mostly seen as the victimization of man by forces beyond his control, whether it is a question of alienation or ecological imbalance or the gap between the rich and the poor within and across national communities, or nuclear proliferation or the asymmetrical nature of power distribution. Contemporary social thinkers have exhausted themselves by attributing the structures of inequity either to larger historical forces or to systemic flaws.

There is another major voice outside the academic world who has not only thought deeply about these crises but has also demonstrated how they can be overcome, if not fully then in very large measure. His name is Pandurang Shastri Athavale, and he is

the driving force behind the idea of *Swadhyaya* (swa-di'-a-ya). His own description of the human predicament and its resolution goes to the core of Swadhyaya:

> There are, in the ultimate analysis, two important problems in human life and society. Firstly, though man is an important being, he is deficient in many things. What can then be the basis for man's self-respect? How can a man lacking in possession, position and intellectual development be made to develop self-esteem? Intellectual acceptance and awareness of indwelling God in us alone can inculcate self-respect and self-esteem in the mind of even the most downtrodden member of human society. Man's relationship with indwelling God is the only way to cultivate such self-respect, self-discipline and self-reliance.
>
> The second dilemma is as to what should be the relationship of man to man. Modern thinkers talk of three types of relationships, friendships, between man and man. These are:
>
> 1. Friendship for profit
> 2. Friendship for pleasure
> 3. Friendship for principle
>
> There is a fourth kind of relationship...and that is friendship for devotion, the relationship of belonging to one another in a brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God.[1]

Indeed, we live in non-believing times and in an age characterized by discontinuities. The growing lack of faith in the integrative role of religion and simultaneous resistance to the homogenizing forces of mass culture have eroded traditional values. These beliefs and values endured through many centuries. There was a shared sense of the primacy of spirituality that linked disparate societies and religions. Worldviews informed by religious outlook have largely been replaced by secular theories of salvation which emphasized the rights of the individual over everything else. Support to these theories by the political establishment, the media

and a section of the intelligentsia has affected the traditional ways we look at human beings and society. These new theories, whatever the language of persuasion they use, ultimately equate "Self" with roles, resulting in spiritually hollow individuals. The integrated order based on earlier spiritual-social consensus has collapsed. Its long-term consequences—exploitation, oppression, bondage, alienation, fragmentation, injustice and psychic damage—are all too apparent.

Nevertheless, till recently the primacy of religion in the life of the individual and the makeup of his society was pervasive and deep. It was a fundamental category through which humans made sense of the benefit of experience for an ennobling existence as well as social cohesion. Religion, as a manifestation of divinity in man, influenced nearly every aspect of life. However, religious-secular conflict, which energized the search for a modern utopia, greatly undermined the reverence for life. Because of the twin assault by the social-Darwinists and Cartesian rationalists, a growing number of people began to feel that the universe had not been created by any divinity and that man had no more a significant role in the world than any other creature. Such conceptions as divine essence and mystic oneness did not satisfy the scientific criteria of modern man because they could not be proven or measured. Consequently, God lost much appeal, and essential elements of religion such as compassionate love of fellow beings, piety and social obligation were devalued.

Though the Marxian aphorism that "criticism of religion is the beginning of all criticisms" partially proved its point, it does not mean that religion has withered away or is facing extinction. In fact, self-confident scientific materialism and the associated Promethean attitude is no longer quite so confident. There has been a value shift, along with a rise in religiosity. It is often a defeatist or defensive variety, born out of a sense of distrust, sullenness and retreat. Most of the time this consciousness is parochial in nature. Modernity is creating needs and anxieties that often drive people to embrace ritualistic aspects of religion either to defend themselves or to defy what are seen as culture-threatening developments.

Still, some others are drawn to the religion to experience the divine, particularly if it is available in neat packages like those offered by numerous cult gurus and mystics worldwide. Indeed, there are so many paths to "supreme truth" that a whole new class of "truth tellers" have come forward to satisfy such needs, in a kind of supply-side spiritualism.

There is yet another initiative that seems more promising, a trend that is ecumenical in nature. In this perspective the ideational conception of "Self" is different; it plays the pivotal role in creating a stable social order. Drawing its inspiration from Indic philosophical traditions, it neither upholds the primacy of individual interests nor does it subordinate them to collective interest. The harmony between the "Self" and the Other is sought through a formulation in which God, the Creator, is bound to his Creation, both the individual and the group, in an integral unity of divinity and humanness. This concept of unity of the universe, of God and man, of individual and society, of everyday existence and higher pursuits of life, is the unique contribution of Indian thought to the progress of mankind. This was perhaps the earliest, the most earnest and also the most enduring endeavor of the human mind to grasp the nature of divine reality.

Swadhyaya's founder, elaborating on the unique Indian concept of life, puts it succinctly:

> "Man" has been defined as a social and rational animal. He has to face a variety of problems and obstacles. But some of the problems which humanity has to face are certainly created by man for man. Some thinkers and philosophers see different types of evil in human society and raise the fundamental question regarding the very purpose of this vast and variegated creation. God created the whole universe, including man. According to our philosophy, God is with us and within us. This creation is a spontaneous act on the part of the Divine who is both transcendent and immanent. So the Lord is not away from the world. In fact, He is actively involved in the lives of all human beings....

Should the Creator put unlimited power in the hands of man, it will spell disaster for mankind. Therefore, the Divine, in his infinite wisdom, has given man the means to work for his progress and enjoy life, intermittent failures and pains notwithstanding, without being a threat to the future of the human society. To face failures with a smile and overcome the pain of sorrows and sufferings, a devotional outlook in life is, however, essential....

Unrestrained pursuit of egoistic physical pleasures and power leads to the exploitation of man by man. I think this is mainly due to man's ignorance. He has simply not realized or acknowledged the importance and necessity of God's existence in his daily life, personal as well as social. He has also forgotten that the earth belongs to God and the earthly things are meant for the happiness and good of all. But acquisitive human beings try to grab more and more wealth for themselves. Karl Marx also tried his best to highlight these problems of exploitation of man by man and alienation [both from himself and from others]. The poor man is a man without means. But there are such "have-nots" in every walk of life. Some are rich, some are poor; some are educated, others are not; some are physically strong, others are weak. Very few are experts while the majority consists of non-experts. Marx worried about the dignity and the lot of the man who was without any means of production and enjoyment. How can such a man maintain his dignity? He possesses neither property nor power. He has neither prestige nor possession in society....

Marx was right when he said: "The problem of economics is the problem of culture." Capitalist social order overestimates the value of material means and thereby undervalues the dignity of man. Marx strongly reacted to this state of affairs and tried to solve this problem by eliminating the "haves" from the society. But this was an ill-conceived approach. It cannot offer a solid foundation for every individual's self-respect and respect for others....

> The answer to this crisis lies in cultivation of the awareness of God's nearness and all-pervasiveness. God dwells in every human heart. So there is a very intimate brotherly relationship between all human beings, irrespective of their creed, class, color or community.
>
> We are not the creators of our self and our body. Nearly ninety percent of our metabolism is beyond our control. We neither start it nor stop it. It goes on with the grace of the Divine.
>
> It is the awareness of this divine presence in all and the resultant sacred relationship that can bring man closer to man, with selfless affection for one another, and can succeed in bringing about the much-needed harmony among various classes and groups in society. If all of us finally pursue this line of thinking and honestly try to translate it into action, I am sure we will definitely succeed in establishing the city of God on this beautiful planet.[2]

However, what was demonstrably universal was seen by the outsider as a particular part of Hinduism. It has been associated by outsiders with the religion of the people who they classified as Hindus. That this notion is exclusively Hindu is alien to Hindu thought. The term Hindu is not found in ancient or medieval texts. In all these books the Hindu, as a separate people, are never mentioned. For the Arabs and the Persians, the term Hindu denoted the people living in a geographical area approximating today's Indian subcontinent. And, for the Europeans, it was also a term to describe a bewildering variety of faiths and beliefs that have prevailed in the Indian subcontinent.

Whatever may have been the antecedents, Indian thought, though concerned with the human condition, was interpreted as a religion of the people outsiders called Hindus and, therefore, something limited and limiting—one religion among others.

In due course, Indians also accepted the term Hindu, believing that no one can really comprehend their civilizational core, their sense of divine unity, the subtlety of their classical wisdom, and its

salience in their social life. However irritating it might have been, and still is, to the outsider, the Hindu, by remaining playfully uncommunicative, perhaps unconsciously used this incomprehension to avoid the marginalization that overtook many other ancient cultures and peoples whose cultures were submerged by those of colonial powers. The Hindu nomenclature, then, is a retrospective label and its philosophical books (particularly the Vedas and Shree Bhagawad Gita) are not books of any specific religion or sect.

However, what began as a term of convenience coined by confused outsiders includes both the bizarre folklore and the highest spiritual essence. The essence is its belief in a creator God and the inability of man to live his life or understand himself without relating himself to the divine. That is indeed his God, and the articulation and conduct of his life in terms of that understanding is his dharma, his religion. Love of one's fellow beings as a matter of duty and direct experience of the divine is the essence of vedanta and that is the ideational source of Swadhyaya. In short, it is a state of mind, a collective consciousness in which certain principles and values have remained eternal.

In a sense the questions that have engaged Indian thought are the philosophical problems that mankind has always tried to come to grips with. Seen in this context, Swadhyaya, which is inspired by this stream of Indian thought and has emerged on Indian soil, is part of the common spiritual legacy of mankind. Despite differences in sacred texts, what matters is the grammar of discourse that has remained the same. This grammar enables one to recognize the inner essence of oneself as the mirror of the divine and to reinforce one's self-affirmation.

Swadhyaya is located precisely at this juncture, a spiritual and social quest which uses the past as the creative element in the living present. It is not an Indian response to Western intellectual penetration or a reaction to India's colonial experience. Swadhyaya is devoted to rediscovering and rerooting its philosophical heritage in the contemporary world. In fact, its diagnostics and prognostics of the contemporary crisis are very different from what is offered by secular theories of "salvation" and happiness.

The abdication of belief in himself and his dignity has wounded man. Swadhyaya seeks to restore human dignity so that man may reconnect himself to God and to others. To be poor is not the worst thing; the worst thing is the feeling of helplessness and lack of one's sense of dignity that divides the hearts of men. Swadhyaya is not an attempt to save something from the flux but to recover something that is lost in the flux. Its nonsectarian spirituality anchors religion in rational thought, gives the individual the aura of grace, and accords value to the material aspects of life. It also confers on individualism the grandeur of collective strength. In short, it marries self-interest to an ideal social order, and confers on both the blessing of God.

To approach Swadhyaya is to be confronted by two elements, discrete but complementary. First of all, the idea of Swadhyaya is to strengthen the universal urge of man to understand the meaning of life in all its diversity, his position in it and his relationship to the external world. Though nondenominational in nature and conception, Swadhyaya is rooted in Indian experience and philosophical traditions that have always tried to transcend the false dichotomy between rationalism and spiritualism. Then one must account for its immense social creativity in the Indian context and how to assess its significance in a non-Indian context.

Undenominated by any label, at one level Swadhyaya is an expression of unity of every one and every thing in divine creation; at another level, it shows a way to harmoniously blend the individual and society. What is happening where Swadhyaya is practiced and where Swadhyaya's thought-seeding has been fruitful is that inner changes in individuals are reflected in every sphere of life.

Swadhyaya is usually described as a socio-religious movement, but the term movement itself is hopelessly vague. Liberation of individuals, creation of community and cultural regeneration are various facets of Swadhyaya. Other movements that seem superficially like Swadhyaya eventually seem to fade away because of the fragility of their temporal roots and their very limited vision.

Swadhyaya is not a religion, a sect or a cult. It entails no membership or vows. It is not like kinship with its tangible structures.

Nevertheless, Swadhyaya bears a strong resemblance to a greatly extended family. The relationships between man and God, man and man, man and society, society and religion do not yield to empirical support or refutation. Such relationships give only a fresh perspective to those who are willing to pause and think and perhaps readjust their visions.

Swadhyaya's literal meaning is study, knowledge and discovery, of the "Self." It is not, however, an exclusively inward journey. It is a journey to work out a unity in a multiverse of cultures and worldviews, of harmonizing "Self" with a network of relationships, of creating and maintaining appropriate connections, of knowing and enriching human action with sacredness. Any effort to understand human action begins with the knowledge of Self. But Self can only be comprehended through the knowledge of how one should live. Swadhyaya, therefore, aims to deal with man in totality. God cannot be excluded from this totality. The relationship with God and the relationship with others are two coordinates without which Self is incapable of finding its way to self-discovery. In knowledge of Self is the knowledge of Being, as well as the knowledge of Becoming.

This takes us to the generative idea of Swadhyaya—the idea of an indwelling God—the bedrock of vedanta philosophy. If there is such a thing as Indian heritage, vedanta is an integral part of it. Its philosophical ideas have continuously acted as agents of ferment in the cultural life of Indic civilization. Vedanta emphasizes unity of all beings, the ultimate ground for human equality and freedom, the "perennial philosophy," as Aldous Huxley called it. Two cardinal principles of vedanta philosophy, *aham brahmasmi* (God is with me) and *tat twam asi* (Thou are That), have been formulated to enhance the individual's self-reverence and to help him or her to see others in the image of divinity. These two laws in simple language mean that moral order cannot be created and sustained without faith in a Creator, a faith which is integrated into daily life.

The second law is every man is my brother. Swadhyaya is vedanta philosophy in practice. It offers a way to look upon all faiths with love. It could play a key part in enlightening humanity. It is one

thing to understand and accept the idea of God within, but it is another thing to live it. As the individual swadhyayees begin to translate the idea of an indwelling God into words and deeds, they and their communities begin to transform themselves. This transformation may be called the Swadhyaya way of life. It challenges the conventional wisdom of the developmentalists and the secularists as well as the liturgical and formulistic wisdom of the clerics and theologians.

Swadhyaya is rooted in religion, but religion not as contemplation of private experience or captive of rituals and of priesthood, but religion that creates harmony between a life of contemplation and a life of action. Today religion is generally perceived in terms of a narrow spiritual mission that generally favors status quo in social and economic order. Indeed, for most secular modern thinkers religion is seen as bondage rather than as liberation. It is perceived as synonymous with mindless rituals, compulsive piety, hostile pride rooted in the past, and unprogressiveness in general. Although it is not consciously engaged in any dialogue with the developmentalists and the modernizers, Swadhyaya sees religion as the essence of any cultural legacy, with direct relevance to the concrete existence of contemporary man, in which public discourse and constructive work is vital. Swadhyaya shows how religion begins to have meaning for an individual when he or she makes his or her response to the Creator. However, religion remains devoid of social content when individuals are unable to come closer to one another because of inability to transcend ego.

Swadhyaya's notion of Self is different from the Western idea of individualism. Its identification of Self with the divine is not a denial of reality. It is through such identification that the sanctity of the Other is realized. "God is with me" or "Thou art That" means enrichment of both the Self and the Other. Swadhyaya's concern with the Self is primarily a concern with achieving commonality. In interdependence there is self-respect and freedom. This is *dharma* (or religion) that binds the individual and social in an integral unity of humanness. It reaches out and connects all the people and the natural world in an organic unity.

Consciousness of being children of the same God and participation in purposeful collective work gives swadhyayees an extraordinary sense of exaltation and expansion. They begin to respond spontaneously to hitherto unappreciated and unappreciating neighbors. For Swadhyaya the idea of human responsibility is inadequate unless imbued with the devotional quality needed to overcome human plight and misery. The uniqueness of Swadhyaya lies in activating devotion as a social force. Through this means individualism becomes a socially binding force and a vital component of civil society because Swadhyaya is reason-based and rooted in many traditions.

At all moments, for most human groups, religion is the reference and the main binding force. Though this living truth is often ignored, it is a simple anthropological/sociological fact that culture is inseparable from religion, spirituality and the commonly held moral values of a community. Religious belief empowers the individual and enables him/her to co-create with his/her community; provides internal critiques and corrections whenever necessary; and opens possibilities for a more humane development of societies.

How this approach may or does work can be seen through the experience of Swadhyaya. Accepted in almost all spiritual traditions but expressed in different ways, Swadhyaya is based on the recognition that God is the source of all life; that He dwells in every human being; and that the individual's own access to the source of enlightenment lies through selfless action as expression of gratitude to the creator God. In other words, it is selfless devotion. Social reform, then, means nothing more than returning to the wellsprings of this ancient wisdom.

Swadhyaya is a multifaceted and life-transforming phenomenon that has reached almost one hundred thousand Indian villages. It has touched the lives of nearly fifteen million people. In a way it is showing the reemergence of the transformative power of the idea of indwelling God in Indian religious consciousness. This may have important lessons for other cultures. Geographically, Swadhyaya covers fourteen Indian states and is also spreading among expatriate Indians in various parts of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas. Yet it maintains a low profile.

To understand how Swadhyaya's vision of a desirable person is connected to the vision of a desirable society, and what explains its apparent success without any support by governmental or religious establishments, several questions need to be answered. What are its ideational mainsprings, its goals and strategies of mobilization, its action programs, and, above all, its energizing force?

Swadhyaya involves transformation, not merely across a range of issues but across the entire realm of human existence. Its holistic vision can be equated with good development as well as good economics and politics at spiritual/ethical and action/operational levels. At the psychological level, it nurtures self-esteem and weds self-interest to social perfection. It fills the emotional void in so many people who have abandoned religion or been abandoned by religion. It encourages a commitment to an enhanced quality of life, both spiritual and material, through self-reliance and self-help. To feel allied to God gives meaning to life and builds up the needed self-reverence, *asmita*.

At the social level, the corollary of self-esteem is the esteem for others. The new perspective enables the swadhyayees to rearrange familiar objects and relationships into new patterns. It promotes harmonious interpersonal relations and intimacy and helps in shedding degrading social practices and habits.

As the inner changes begin to manifest themselves at personal and social levels, they also begin to influence the economic life of individuals. As if by osmosis and not through any coercion, individual swadhyayees in course of time tend to give up wasteful habits like drinking, gambling or ostentatious expenditure on social occasions. That, of course, improves the personal economics. But more important than that is Swadhyaya's idea of impersonal wealth, *apaurusheya Lakshmi,* for the material welfare of the community, particularly its indigent members. Impersonal wealth may or may not enrich the individual swadhyayees materially or teach them to earn a living, but it does teach them how to live.

Though Swadhyaya does not encourage those who believe in it to attack or to defend existing structures of the society or the state and has avoided the embrace of formal politics, it has a political

dimension. It creates spontaneous, rooted-in-culture, problem-solving mechanisms totally outside the bureaucratic or formal political apparatus.

For almost all of those who have come into contact with Swadhyaya and have been touched by it, it has brought about a permanent transformation in their lives. They look at Swadhyaya as a cultural/religious manifestation of the idea of an indwelling God. To outside observers it is seen as a bold experiment of social creation and an evolving economic design that liberates the individual from the old confining ways of work and living. Indeed, Swadhyaya has offered a new agenda for development to Indian society in particular and to others in general. More importantly, it has been showing how such an agenda can be carried out. Swadhyaya's agenda appears to be socially attainable, humanistically desirable and economically feasible. It is apparently compatible with Earth and its finite resources, and is proving successful in bringing people closer to each other, gathering the alienated back into the warmth of community, and in giving precedence to the creative forces of the human psyche over economic ones. Swadhyaya's ultimate goal is the non-institutionalized respiritualization of society. In doing so and without saying so, it treats spiritual, human, and economic development as process rather than goal.

The value of Swadhyaya lies as much in its thoughts as in its unfolding activities. These activities, which revolve around *bhakti* (devotion), give expression to the core ideas of Swadhyaya. The principle of bhakti has two important aspects: one, self-exploration with a view to coming closer to God (*bhav bhakti,* mystic and contemplative surrender) and two, identity with the material world for ennobling collective existence (through *kriti bhakti* or an active/creative principle of devotion to promote communal good). Together, these inspire social and economic activities aimed at regenerating the collective existence of human beings.

Through a series of practical steps and program, the awareness that the "Self" is the abode of the Divine is facilitated. The individual swadhyayee must serve and sustain the divine work and sublimate his ego by disinterestedly offering his excellence, expertise

and efficiency (nipunata) to purposive collective action in the framework of devotional offering, divine fraternity and selfless work. These activities, socially and ecologically sound, are like a string of beads, all linked by one unifying theme—the need to express gratitude to God through devotion of one's time and talent. These activities in India include: farming, fishing, forestry, irrigation, potable water supply, hygiene, water harvesting and conservation, dairy farming, trading, vocational training and sundry other activities. However, it is not the utilitarian aspect of these activities which attract the swadhyayees, but rather the spiritual and social energy they create and absorb, and the sense of social purpose which these activities engender.

All in all, Swadhyaya recognizes that what human beings need, besides food, shelter and security, essentially consists of the following:

- self-dignity and esteem for one's cultural heritage,
- a sense of becoming,
- a sense of pursuing worthy ideals,
- a sense of belonging to a worthy group,
- a sense of participation,
- a sense of being in command of one's destiny,
- a sense of wholeness, and
- a sense of justice in the larger order.

Through reinterpretation and restoration of old metaphysical assumptions, Swadhyaya is profoundly changing the lives of a fairly large segment of Indians—culturally, socially, psychologically and economically. Swadhyaya, then, is a set of ideas and practices, sanctioned by dharma, that makes the dignity of the individual the object of that regard which belongs to the sacred. Over the years, away from the spotlight, it has engaged the minds of the people from a cross-section of the population: professionals, businessmen, farmers, fishermen, etc. The unusual involvement of this mass of humanity has to be seen to be believed. In an age of media hype, Swadhyaya has avoided publicity. Its approach is simple: judge Swadhyaya by its work.

Dada and his lifework

The extraordinary thinker and seer who had this alternative vision and the courage and energy to translate it into reality is the seventy-five-year-old founder and prime mover of Swadhyaya, Pandurang Vaijnath Athavale, endearingly addressed by millions as Dada (elder brother). Some people also address him as Shastriji, the traditional honorific title for a great scholar. Dada is a highly accessible philosopher, a scholar and a teacher with extraordinary persuasive powers. He combines an intense inner life of mind and the equally intense life of an activist and a constructive worker. Though he has never attended a university, he is a university unto himself. He has written or edited no book, though his oral discourses, if compiled, would run into hundreds of volumes.

This is entirely in keeping with his character; he is modest and not interested in drawing attention to himself. He steers clear of politics of any kind, including the politics of interfaith dialogue. He has allowed his personality to flow dissolvingly into the Swadhyaya stream. The life of Dada is so intertwined with Swadhyaya that his life details have become secondary to the mission of Swadhyaya. (For a more intimate sketch of Dada's life, see the essay by Suma Varughese elsewhere in this volume.) He is a man of immense personal presence and enormous erudition. Because of his range of experience and the lucidity of his ideas, his mind is essentially didactic and reflective. At the same time he is a great organizer and a pragmatist.

To understand issues of human dignity and equality across diverse cultures and traditions, Dada has read extensively. This self-education in world cultural and religious history has led him to understand the essentials of socialist dialectics and liberal rationalism, but he has also rejected their materialistic exclusivity. He does not demonize liberalism, Marxism, or any other "ism." He has a disarming ability to disagree without being disagreeable and to set forth his views without being contentious. As a participant in the Second World Religions Congress in Japan in 1954, he, rejecting both unbridled materialism and fatalism, stressed the salience of

the vedic way of life for creating an integrated personality, a universal man. He spoke of the relevance of the Bhagawad Gita (Gita in short) in resolving the predicament of modern man and in solving the problems of material life, both at the individual and social levels. He proposed an alternative utopian order, based on selfless love, dignity accorded to all, and co-sharing for community well-being, drawing upon the socio-philosophical wisdom of the Gita and weaving it into a unified approach to life. But he had no answer when he was asked whether there was any village or community in India which lived by the Gita's ideals. He took it as a challenge and decided to work out his ideas at home instead of becoming an academician or a roving philosopher in the West, as Arthur Holly Compton, a Nobel laureate physicist from America, wanted him to do.

On his return to India, Dada continued teaching and preaching at Shrimad Bhagvad Gita Pathshala, Madhavbaug, Bombay, a seat of non-formal learning in vedic thought set up by his father, Shri Vaijnath Laxman Athavale Shastri, more than sixty years ago.

Beginning in the mid-fifties, an increasing number of young professionals such as solicitors, accountants, physicians, engineers, teachers, etc. in the Bombay area were attracted by Dada's ideas. Like their contemporaries they were skeptics because their idealism was not reflected in the world outside. They found old formulations useless and were keen to know where to find new understandings of the relationship between God and man without abandoning their inherited traditions. They were acutely aware that religion-oriented worldviews were under relentless attack from secular ideologies. They had nothing with which to counter-attack. Dada clearly showed them that the philosophical ideas of vedanta are magnificent in concept but beyond the capacity of most individuals who attempt to live by such precepts. His first task was to enable people to raise their capacities to meet those goals. In that sense Dada is the philosophical catalyst of Swadhyaya. He picked a score of these young men among his early listeners and had lengthy and intense discussions with them at Bombay's sea beach for a period of more than two years.[3] These young men, and

whoever has come in contact with Dada, have been attracted by a certain loftiness and integrity of his character, his learning, his infectious optimism, and his selfless love for others. Some of them were to assume leading roles in spreading the message of Swadhyaya. Dada inspired these city-based professionals to go to the villages of the Saurashtra region of Gujarat for a fortnight on *bhaktipheri* (devotional tours or visits), with an intent to make the villagers aware of human brotherhood and to shake them off their cynicism which had crept in everywhere. Eventually, bhaktipheri was to serve as the key to the mobilizational activities of Swadhyaya. Though initially cynical, these city-bred young professionals went to Saurashtra like traditional itinerants, with one difference. While the traditional itinerants would be offered or would extract local hospitality, they were prohibited from doing so. The original trickle became a stream in a short time, but more about it later.

Swadhyayees insist, and it is true, as has been attested by several observers, that Dada does not impose his decisions; he may restrain or suggest a line of action when he has fully examined the matter and is convinced of the enthusiasm for it among the swadhyayees.[4] He has immense faith in swadhyayees to carry from then on. The overwhelming response to bhaktipheris convinced him of the need to extend, multiply, consolidate and coordinate Swadhyaya activities. He opted against hierarchic, formalized bureaucratic structures. Instead, he preferred dense and intensive networks at each level. Each network is so organized that it is capable of drawing on its own resources to act on behalf of the local swadhyayee community. The idea is to unite and to organize and work as a family—a recurrent metaphor of Swadhyaya. The model is familial and its operating principle is family-like consensus. The family communality is reflected at every level, from the village upwards, and is a powerful stimulus for voluntary cooperation. In fact, Dada is seen by his followers as the head of the Swadhyaya family. As the patriarch, Dada inspires the ever-growing number of swadhyayees and plays the vital role of institution-builder.

Himself a married man and a householder, Dada believes that home is the true hermitage of man. By dutifully performing the

obligations of a householder, the individual becomes truly heroic. Dada does not reject worldly pursuits, not because they are ultimate but because their claims cannot be ignored by people. Self-abnegation is not in keeping with human nature. However, man can and must moderate his desires and lead a restrained life. This is possible if he and his corporate community internalize this vision. Only by adhering to such a code can he find his true nature, and identify with his family, with his community and with humanity at large. Swadhyaya renews and reaffirms the consensual structure of society which undergirds the individual existence.

Dada is similar and yet different from most Indian savants who preceded him. His is a different vision and a different voice. Like others, his sources of inspiration are the Vedas, the smritis and the Bhagawad Gita, and he shares with them the urge to seek truth and justice. But for Dada, the test of truth lies in action. Though he has not spoken exclusively in the name of the wretched of the earth, like Gandhi did, perhaps no other contemporary Indian has achieved so much for the dispossessed as he has done.

Dada's desirable vision does not extoll asceticism, continence or otherworldliness, which normally is part of the pontificating package offered by the religious gurus. Instead, he sees the need of ordinary worldly man to live in the commonsense world of materialism. Dada makes allowance for his nature, but he does not celebrate indulgence. He seeks to achieve it through a route of affectionate intimacy rather than purgation, and by showing how life is endowed with sacredness to which sensuous living is alien.

Instead of preaching, Dada has shown how the path of selfless action has been the central feature of Indian tradition and how it can be made to work for the betterment of the individual and the community. For him Swadhyaya is productive work imbued with devotion to God; not a competitive drive but a social duty to show gratitude to God who sustains the creation. Such detached activism, a controlled philosophical activism, is different from the activism of Christianized liberalism, nor is it yoked to any particular nationalist credo. Dada's interpretation of activism is different from that of the great Shankara, who seemed to give primacy to



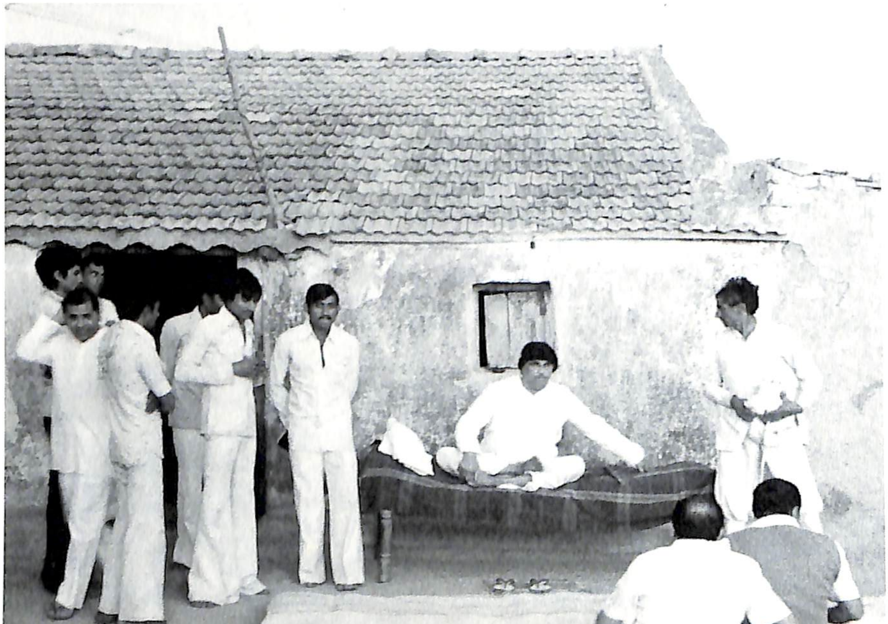
Dada in communion with the villagers. It is through such converse that he turns ordinary men and women into extraordinary individuals without losing their ordinariness.



Through Matsyagandha, the floating temple of the fishermen, they have put in practice what they have learnt from Dada: "In you is the power to work; work, and God is ready to help you".



Devotion put into action. Swadhyayee farmers on a Yogeshwar krushi farm.





Dialogue with people—Dada in conversation with swadhyayees. What swadhyayees imbibe from Dada is their priceless lesson in culture.

Opposite: *Change of dress or lifestyle does not build self-esteem; selfless devotion does. Dada drives this message home in a rural setting.*



Pilgrim's progress. Dada listening to farmers.



From heart to heart and hut to hut, Dada brings Vedic wisdom unto the last. He asks them to have trust in their own worth as children of God.



Sea of humanity. A usual congregation of a million-plus swadhyayees every year when they celebrate Dada's birthday (October 19) by dedicating themselves to uphold human dignity.



Beginnings of a Vrkshamandir orchard. The idea of these divine orchards reflects Dada's aesthetic view of life, tranquility of nature, and purity of character.



From wasteland to a fully developed orchard. Vrkshamandirs prove Dada's vision that activity which relates to love of God is bhakti.



Grooming the Brain Trust. Dada exhorts the youth to remember the divine nature of life, to develop "we- feeling" with fellow beings and to cultivate knowledge.



Dada with swadhyayees of a Shree darshanam farming project, involving about twenty villages. Experiments differ, but the message remains the same: self-development through self-less action.



Patanjali Chikatsalaya, a medical center with a difference in the interior of the forest land. For city-bred doctors, Swadhyaya means listening, meeting, thinking and self-less performance—an exercise in dilution of ego, self-understanding, and an effort to relate self with God.



Loknath Amritalayam—a temple without walls, a temple for all.

jnana (knowledge), and from that of Ramanuja and Madhava, who favored immersion in and total attachment to God verging on withdrawal from worldly pursuits. Dada, while stressing the unity of knowledge, action and devotion, looks at action as doing daily duty and equates it with devotion to God. For him activism is not a substitute of faith but it reinforces faith. He glorifies the ordinary householder, men and women performing their daily duties as a devotional act. Selfless action in Swadhyaya not only establishes the individual's communion with God but also fosters co-development of the community in which the individual is located. Another alternative formulation of Dada is with regard to the social service and social work. He finds such service elitist in nature. He believes that showing gratitude to God through collective efforts is not part of a new philosophy of humanism but a new perspective of inter-dependence of life, free from dichotomies of self-interest and interest of others. Social service reinforces the donor-donee syndrome, in which the first casualty is the dignity and autonomy of the recipient. The donor expects the recipient to be passive and pliable. Dada rejects such social engineering. Instead, he seeks to protect the individual by first anchoring "Self" in God, and then by establishing the compatibility between the individual and the social good by subordinating ego through selfless action in common endeavors.

Through constant converse with swadhyayees, Dada seeks to infuse in them a certitude in the vision of a desirable social order. In this order, the disinherited must find their due place and dharma must be returned to them not as a solace but as a means to achieve a just society. He does not view dharma as something that can only be understood by Hindus, though Hindu consciousness is centered in dharma. The transition from personal to social is facilitated by a series of practical steps.

Making the most innovative use of this dharmic consciousness, traditional symbols, beliefs, and imageries, he endows these elements with new contents and meanings, or in many cases rehabilitates their original meaning. He is convinced that the traditional moral codes have, through the ages, lost their original purport; their

regeneration cannot be sustained by blind, passive faith in the face of a new spirit of inquiry. He is also not charmed by the noises made by secular ideologues of various hues against traditional and religion-oriented worldviews. He is constantly trying to enrich and expand the feeling of brotherhood by invoking vedic wisdom. He mobilizes a wide variety of religious and secular arguments to create a shareable symbolic universe.[5] He has no hesitation in accepting his identity as a Hindu. He is equally insistent on his spiritual links with other faiths.

Through such ingenuity in discovering tradition, Dada has built up an entirely new lexicon that gives fresh meanings to older concepts and puts them in new categories.[6] He is a supporter of *Varnavyavastha* (four-fold division of ancient Indian social order), but he gives it an entirely new meaning. For him, everyone who does God's work is a Brahmin since God resides in him. An *asprashya* (untouchable) is one who has been deserted by God. He has given new nomenclatures and a sense of pride to social groups located on the periphery of the Hindu social order: cultivators are *bhumiputras* (sons of the soil); fishermen are *sagarputras* (sons of the sea), with allusion of their linkage with Matsyavatar (the first of Vishnu's incarnations). Even the lowly coolies (porters) become *Vasudev sena* (army of Vasudev), alluding to the mythological story that Vasudev had carried his son, Krishna, in a basket on his head across the flooded river Yamuna. The idea is that, in keeping with the heritage of the people, each group must be imbued with a sense of pride in its occupation, thus empowering them to discard the traditional docility that was associated with their lowly avocations.

Immersed in classical Indian philosophy and the Hindu scriptural corpus, at the same time extremely well-read in knowledge generated in the West, Dada's talks and conversations are laced with ideas from the modern thinkers. From his discourses one cannot but come away deeply impressed by the scholarship and interpretative brilliance of his exegesis. He brings to bear a deep knowledge of Sanskrit sources and an equally deep acquaintance with contemporary literature on philosophy, sociology, psychology and economics. He is quite open and has a synthesizing approach to

the reconstruction of his native tradition. The key element of this approach is his didactic but resilient approach to East-West encounters. He acknowledges the tensions that often accompany such encounters and accommodates them within the traditional framework, although with a revolutionary intent. In this sense, the Hindu corpus is quite open-ended and amenable to various interpretations.

Dada belongs to that tradition of scholars/seers who have challenged many accepted interpretations of scriptures, codes and mores without incurring the wrath of orthodox Hindus. He questions old practices but he is never contemptuous of them. He wants to find out the reasons behind them. He accepts those practices that withstand the test of reason. He believes that true knowledge consists of creating a holistic worldview rather than atomizing it further through divisive prejudices. In his hands mythology and even rituals become symbologies, a tool of rational cognition instead of false formation, as Spengler would put it. In a society where unthinking traditional observances are pervasive, their modification arouses anxiety but becomes necessary for effective social reordering. To cite one example: Dada has given *yagnopaveet* (sacred thread which only the twice-born caste Hindus are entitled to carry) to fishermen and other lower caste swadhyayees, a blasphemous act in the eyes of the orthodox. From the very beginning, Dada has sought to involve various social classes in ways that are widely participative and pleasant.

Dada's concern is not reforming Hindu society but enabling people to move to a different level of existence by marrying vedantic ideals with existential conditions to form the basis of a new human order. When we say that Krishna or Jesus or Muhammad were universal persona, it is not because Krishna was less of an Indian or Jesus less of a Palestinian or Muhammad a lesser Arab. They are universal because their teachings are universal. Similarly, Dada enables the swadhyayees to facilitate contemporary man's integration into a community where his self-esteem can be restored to him. Self-estrangement of man cannot be overcome through law or philanthropy or by confronting a ritualized religion

or rebelling against well-entrenched practices and prejudices. To reach new thresholds of religious experience, it is important that man not cut himself off from his inherited religion. That is his cultural legacy. In fact, Dada has shown how, in an Indian context, transition is possible from the ethics written down in ancient tomes to actual living in today's world, and how such ancient wisdom can open the way to social change.

Two important elements characterize his strategy. One, he does not reject tradition as part of building a new social order; he uses it to bring far-reaching changes to the existing order. And, two, to incorporate and make acceptable the rationalist, humanist and modern ideas. Moving creatively within the restraints of Hindu culture and its formal rules, he frequently breaks them. This resilience is behind both his freedom and restraint. He probes the whyness of Hindu tenets rather than blindly accepting thoughts held sacred by traditionalists or dry scholarship. For Dada there is no reason why a Christian or a Muslim cannot be a swadhyayee because he sees no antagonism between personal faith and Swadhyaya, which is an attitude, a way of thinking, and a way of living.

Swadhyaya's constructive work

Swadhyaya, then, is the great accommodation of the material with the spiritual and between the individual and the social. This cohesiveness is achieved and its continuity is maintained by relating small concrete programs to the larger frame of ideas and beliefs that is reflected in each of its activities.

The Swadhyaya activities are all of a piece. They seek to renew bonds of brotherhood, and foster values which are held dear in Indic civilization, not in the sense of accumulation of old resentments but in the sense of a living faith. They represent the externalization of the principle of bhakti which, as praxis, has two very important aspects: the personal relationship with God and the social aspect of devotion. That is, in Swadhyaya, personal devotion undergoes a process of transmutation to take the shape of concrete social and economic activities aimed at regenerating the collective existence of man.

The transmutation of the personal into social is the key to preserving the organic solidarity of society. While Swadhyaya's inspiration is the world-view of the Vedas and the Gita, its contemporary manifestation is a harmonious society avoiding the follies of secular ideologies, i.e., capitalism and communism. In this endeavor, Swadhyaya sees past as an ally and not as an enemy. It seeks to bring the diverse elements of a plural society into a complementary rather than competitive relationship, a key element in the vedic worldview. But how can the substance of the individual and of the group and also the differences between individuals and groups be reconciled and unified?

This is possible through Swadhyaya because it brings to the individual the realization that he or she is a child of God as others are. This realization makes it easier for the individual to identify with others as brothers and sisters. Through this process of self-development Swadhyaya becomes a potent force of social regeneration. The transmutation of the personal into social is facilitated by a series of metaphysical and practical steps. If man or woman is the child of God, he or she must serve God. This is possible only when the phenomenal world is accepted as real and not devalued; the creation of God must be as real as God Himself. It then follows that to serve God it is necessary to sustain and support the life-world.

Given this, the problem of *ahamkara* (egoism) has to be tackled not by suppressing or annihilating it, as some schools of Indian thought insist, but by sublimating it. To suppress it entirely is to eviscerate individuality, and to aggrandize it is to jeopardize collectivity. As such, the sublimation of ego requires the cultivation of self-respect, self-confidence and self-reliance in order that the God within may not be humiliated by self-pity and self-degradation. This sublimation helps develop in the individual a sense of pride in his or her calling whether hereditary or acquired, and induces him or her to fully exercise his or her nipunata (expertise or proficiency). Bhakti in the personal life of the individual is thus an agent of metamorphosis. It connects the individual with the supreme principle. But this connection is more than an intellectual awareness; it is devotional in the sense that the individual makes an

offering of himself, an act of self-surrender. It is in this sense that he becomes a devotee, a bhakt. But to be devoted to an idea, one needs some material support to visualize the idea and to concentrate on it. That is why Swadhyaya insists on *sagun upasana,* i.e. worship of God with specific attributes. It is for this reason that Yogeshwar Krishna is the supreme deity of the swadhyayees.

Bhakti in the personal life is an agent of transformation. But it has a social aspect too. The awareness that there is an integral relatedness among conditioned beings brings home not only a sense of common destiny but also of common endeavor for improving collective life. It is this interrelatedness of the personal and the collective that is the fountainhead of kriti bhakti. It is in this context that the concepts of bhaktipheri, kriti bhakti and apaurusheya Lakshmi (impersonal wealth) become intelligible and related.

Social creation and innovation begin with bhaktipheri. It highlights the centrality of community-building as a mission of Swadhyaya to reduce social distances and tensions that have eroded the idea of brotherhood of mankind. On the part of swadhyayees, it all begins by choice to take some time out (at least two days in a month) to share with others and make them co-explorers in quest of self-development. Such a swadhyayee activist, whatever be his or her station in life, carrying his or her own food and accepting hospitality from none, travels with unfailing regularity a couple of times or even more to remote or nearby areas. This is strictly a self-imposed obligation. Bhaktipheri then tends to integrate the ideas of bhakt (a pilgrim or searcher who is integrated) with the peculiarities and susceptibilities of local communities.

It is through bhaktipheri that the divine fellowship of Swadhyaya begins to grow, expand and consolidate. Within this framework, Swadhyaya encourages its adherents to undertake a novel kind of *teerthyatra* (pilgrimage), to supplement the usual daily bhaktipheris. It is undertaken by a group of five to ten persons, mostly couples, for a week-long bhaktipheri. They spend five to six days in a village or two, observing the discipline of not accepting any material hospitality in the host village except minimal shelter. Over this period they visit various parts of the village and discuss

the message of Swadhyaya with individuals and with groups. At the end of it all, these pilgrims assemble at a predesignated place to show their gratitude to God and to renew their determination to work for Him. Either Dada is personally present to exhort them or there is a videotaped message from him explaining the significance of such activity.

The reiterative nature of bhaktipheri and teerthyatra are two crucial modes for integrating myriad local communities into Swadhyaya parivar (family). These are especially important because the integrative tasks accomplished by it are uniquely large, and they have enjoyed exceptional longevity and stability, month after month and year after year. On a conservative estimate, more than two hundred thousand swadhyayees participate in these activities on a regular basis. The activities of these congregations now define the rhythms of everyday life along with other temporal cycles (gathering the harvest, etc.) which regulate the activity of individuals and their micro-communities.

We have seen earlier that Swadhyaya had simple and local beginnings. We know how Dada encouraged his young interlocutors in Bombay to periodically go to the interior villages to spread the message of brotherhood of man with a view to enable the individual to find his true nature, to identify with his family, with his local community, and with humanity at large. The idea was to mutually reinforce each other in a journey of self-understanding and to face life anomalies. Indeed, at one level, Swadhyaya would have just remained a metaphor; it became more meaningful and exciting when the swadhyayees could broaden their exploration. These meetings give the swadhyayees opportunities to listen to each other, share anecdotal experiences, vignettes and reflections that contribute to organized remembrance. Its net effect is to further the feeling of community built on Swadhyaya ideals.

In a sense, Swadhyaya is a silent pilgrimage; the swadhyayees are the pilgrims whose progress has been guided by Dada. These gatherings, which bring together simple peasants, fishermen and city-bred sophisticates, have a gaiety and an élan that promotes decency and family feeling and deepens the knowledge of God and the

sense of gratitude it engenders. Indeed, bhaktipheri and teerthyatra are part of Swadhyaya's design to reweave human connections. By participating in them the swadhyayees feel better about their lives and commitments. They gain a sense of learning and co-discovery. The community involvement thereby becomes an educational process for the people involved and gives them an experience of life which no school seems capable of imparting.

Bhaktipheris are meant to cultivate living contacts with other people and to utilize these contacts for spreading God's love. But this is only the first step. It has to be followed by purposive collective action for improving socioeconomic conditions. Various economic activities are undertaken on a collective basis. These activities (also called experiments) create wealth but it belongs to no one in particular; it is Yogeshwar's and therefore impersonal. It is in this interlinked process that the personal and social are conjoined in a harmonious way.

Yogeshwar krushi is one such activity which involves a rural community engaged in farming. It revolves around farming activity which is familiar to rural swadhyayees, and in which they have *nipunata* (skill). But there is a crucial difference between Swadhyaya's mobilization of peasants and that of other movements. While secular movements mobilize the peasantry on the basis of distinct interests and rights and seek state protection and material support for functioning, Swadhyaya is not involved in questions of property relations and rights and tries to create a common ground where disinterested action aiming at the good of all is possible. The very opening up of this space projects the possibility of deepening its impact to transform the mentality of man. Its initial effort is to rid the farmers of docility and the lower strata of servility and instill in them a feeling of self-respect. The farming community also learns self-reliance and escapes dependence on the state or anybody else.

Yogeshwar krushi as a concrete manifestation of kriti bhakti came into being as a result of insistent requests by swadhyayee peasants to know how best they could offer their nipunata to God. Already, the swadhyayee farmers of Dabhoi Taluka in Baroda

district (county) in the western Indian state of Gujarat have been operating a large farm since the mid-seventies. The experience has gradually been extended elsewhere. Under this experiment, the swadhyayees take a plot of land in the village at prevailing rates and engage in collective farming by contributing their *shram bhakti* (devotional labor) to show their gratitude and devotion to God. Since all swadhyayees are keen to volunteer their labor, an individual gets a chance to work on the Yogeshwar krushi farm for only one or two days in a cropping season: on that day he or she is called a *pujari,* a priest. On a given day, there are six to ten pujaris or more, depending on the size of the farm, and the period of cropping cycle. Besides tending the field, they also have to attend to temple duties. The temple is housed in a straw hut put up on the farm at the beginning of the cropping season.[7]

The resulting crop belongs to no one except God. No one can claim ownership of the produce. The labor input is the offering of peasants in their role as priests. The wealth (Lakshmi, in Swadhyaya idiom) generated by the sale of output belongs to God and hence is apaurusheya or impersonal. One-third of this income is used to meet short-term needs of the indigent, not as loan or charity, but as prasad (that offering of devotees to God which is blessed by Him and distributed among them as grace at the end of a religious service in temples and at homes). The recipient is under no obligation to repay it, and definitely no interest has to be paid on such sums. The giving and receiving of these sums is done so discreetly and with such subtle grace that it obviates any sense of inferiority on the part of the recipients. It is free from donor-donee syndrome. The remaining two-thirds of the income is kept in a trust fund called Madhavi Raksha Sankalp (an interest-free savings fund derived from earnings) to meet the long term needs of the community and to buy agricultural supplies needed for Yogeshwar krushi from time to time.[8]

In modern times, the usual panacea contemplated for eradicating the ills arising from inequality of possession is sought in some form of social ownership. Collective or cooperative farms in China, Kibbutz farms in Israel and Gandhian gramdan farms in

India are a few illustrations of this approach. These three examples reflect the primary importance of will and interest as the basis of collective enterprise. However, their veneer of accord, goodwill and cooperation evaporates in the heat generated by incompatible wills and by conflicting interests. Gramdan overcomes these difficulties to a certain extent by allowing individual farming and appropriation of gains even while the ownership of land legally vests in the village. However, when self-sacrifice, public spirit and cooperation dry up in the heat of self-interest, the community patiently waits for the evolution of a satyagrahi. Swadhyaya argues that when change of ownership takes place before the change in the psychology of man, the egotism of economic man is bound to dominate and thwart the emergence of the self-sufficient satyagrahi or the socially motivated trustee or the enlightened socialist.

Swadhyaya believes that socialization of ownership is no answer to man's economic predicament. The answer is kriti bhakti and not novel means of egalitarian divisions of property or wealth. The force of Yogeshwar krushi and much of Swadhyaya's constructive work is kriti bhakti, since equalization of possession does not necessarily eradicate avarice and acquisitiveness. The participants here consider God to be their co-partner in their daily life, and the only way they can express their gratitude to God is by offering Him their skills and labor for a few days in a year. The leit-motif is devoting one's time and efficiency to God's work for self-development and collective good, not in the framework of competition and fear, but in the framework of devotional offering, brotherhood, harmony and selfless action.

The idea of a modern, secular welfare state has yet to become an integral part of national consciousness in many parts of the world. India is no exception. The unincorporated, neglected and marginal socioeconomic groups in India are seen as incorrigibly parochial collectivities which refuse to be homogenized. Paradoxically, many such groups have been traditionally treated as peripheral to the majority culture, although they are functionally integrated in the larger social order. From the very outset, Swadhyaya recognized the need to empower these lost and

alienated groups to rediscover their religio-cultural roots and truly become integral parts of the cultural mainstream, not by force but by choice. Swadhyaya began to work among diverse disinherited groups, not to proselytize them but to raise their self-esteem and heighten their consciousness of a rich cultural heritage. One such group was of the fishermen spread along the coastline of peninsular India, particularly of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa. Aggressive, adventurous and sturdy, the fishermen were notorious for heavy drinking, gambling, smuggling and all kinds of petty and major crimes. They were despised for their profligacy and for their supposed criminal tendencies. They even treated each other with disdain. Internecine gang warfare was not uncommon. Undaunted, Swadhyaya approached them without any conditions or demands in the mid-sixties. The fishermen took some time to be convinced of the bona fides of the Swadhyaya and the genuineness of its message of human brotherhood. Once convinced, thousands of these fishermen identified themselves totally with Swadhyaya.

These sagarputras (sons of the sea), as Dada calls them, started offering a portion of their earnings (normally a day's catch each month) at the feet of Yogeshwar. Soon enough they had substantial cash resources. They also wanted to know from Dada about the best way of offering their nipunata (expertise and skills) to God. They knew only two: how to be sailors and fishermen. A productive use of their capital and nipunata had to be found. Ultimately, the suggestion came from Dada that with these funds, belonging to no one but God, they could buy motorized boats, more efficient tools and tackle. Fishing could be their way to express their devotion to the Creator.

Thus, the experiment called Matsyagandha (after a legendary fisherwoman) took its shape. For the sagarputra, the name itself evokes pride in their inherited calling, and they treat these Matsyagandha boats as floating temples. A crew of six to ten persons is onboard each boat. The swadhyayee fishermen can be identified at sea by a special flag that their boats carry so that they can come to the aid of each other in emergencies. Fishing goes on all year except for a three-month pause during the Monsoon period

which is used for repairs and refitting the boats. The volunteers for Matsyagandha being so many, no individual fisherman gets a chance for more than one trip in a year.[9] And when the boat is docked during the Monsoon, the seamen among the swadhyayees who are home between voyages (most work in the merchant marine) take over the job of repairs and refitting the boats.

This experiment in generating impersonal wealth through fishing on motorized boats and trawlers, and dredging sand from the estuary bed, is similar to Yogeshwar krushi. There is no employer and no employee: there are no owners and no workers: none has claim over what he has willingly offered to God. Each fisherman and seaman is a pujari (priest), while he is on this floating temple. The disbursement of wealth created by Matsyagandha is similar to that of Yogeshwar krushi. This experiment, too, is in its infancy, nearly fifteen years old. To date there are seventy-five vessels and a few more are added each year. An open sea-going cargo ship, S.S. *Jayashree Sagar,* was launched in October 1996. The work among the fishermen is spread over 2700 kilometers of coastline in western India, covering over a million fishermen. Over two million rupees are being distributed as prasad every year.

Work on farms or at sea is influenced neither by the profit motive nor by personal preferences, but rather by the sense of filial duty to God and a means of strengthening the ties of brotherhood.

There is yet another extremely important experiment of *Vrkshamandirs* (tree temples). It reflects Swadhyaya's reverence for the environment and belief in the omnipresence of god and unity of everyone and everything in divine creation. For Swadhyaya, trees are a living testament to the omnipresence of God. Acting on this idea, swadhyayees have started renting large pieces of barren lands on long-term lease, or outright purchase, and turning them into *upavans* (orchards or woodlands) and naming these upavans after a vedic sage.[10] After acquiring an upavan plot, swadhyayees from fifteen to twenty villages around the upavan and from neighboring towns first rehabilitate its land, dig wells for irrigation, and then dig the pits for saplings. Most are fruit trees. Finally, the day arrives when at a given time, thousands of Swadhyayees, from far

and near, stand with a sapling in their hands to lower them into the pits. In about five minutes, planting of an orchard of, say, forty acres, is complete.

Swadhyayees from the neighboring villages and towns take turns tending these saplings and trees for twenty-four hours, twice or three times in a year, in a spirit of devotion as pujaris. These pujaris number over seventy thousand. As a result, large plots of barren land are turning into beautiful lush green orchards, where the survival rate of plants is claimed to be nearly one hundred percent. The first upavan was raised in July 1979, and eighteen upavans, covering an area of about four hundred acres, have already begun producing. Raising up upavans is also an ongoing activity. Work is currently proceeding on a couple of orchards that may come up soon.

Having seen three of these upavans, a ten-year-old, a five-year-old and one-year-old, it is staggering to imagine the impersonal wealth they are creating and can create in future. These upavans are also uniting the rich and the poor, the high castes and the low castes, the erstwhile neighborhood enemies, the learned and the illiterate of the neighboring towns and villages into a closely knit fabric of Swadhyaya brotherhood. A work of this magnitude under the governmental social forestry scheme costs millions of rupees, with a high loss rate of plants and numerous complaints against it from those who are supposed to be its beneficiaries.

It is not the utilitarian aspect of Yogeshwar krushi, Matsyagandhas or upavans which sustains the interests of swadhyayees; nor it is some kind of agrarian or arborous utopia that draws them to Swadhyaya. What concerns them is not the wealth they create but the spiritual, cultural and social energy they generate and absorb. The attraction lies in the sense of social purpose and efficacy of these activities. Swadhyayees are not unaware of the ugliness in the world, but instead of blocking it out of consciousness, they create an alternative. The expressive signs of Swadhyaya activities may be a good crop of cotton, peanuts or tobacco, a good catch at sea, or abundant fruits in their orchards, but it is their social achievements which mark them apart. People who were no longer able to identify with their family and even less with their village

are now building large communities on the basis of shared ideals and totally identifying with them. All this is happening because Swadhyaya equates the sublime in dharma with *nishkama karma* (selfless action) for communal good. These activities are undertaken with a sense of obligation to God. Activism is not a substitute for faith, though it could and should reinforce faith.

Dada derives inspiration not only from his own tradition but from underlying values and thoughts expressed in other traditions as well. Dada was struck by Lao Tse's utopia of a totally autonomous and detached-from-civilization village. He found it instructive. He thought that human order (which is not opposed to divine order) of things need not be so constrictive. To confirm this belief, he has introduced the idea of *Shree darshanam* (vision of prosperity) in recent years, where swadhyayees from about twenty villages come together to work on a single large farm of twenty acres or even more. Such divine communes now number more than a dozen. Through this commonwealth of love, Dada wishes to build selfless relations among neighboring villages, inspire the people to sublimate their egos, and extend the inclusiveness of community.

Swadhyaya activism grounds its predispositions and embeddedness explicitly in spiritual heritage. Yogeshwar krushi, Matsyagandha and Vrkshamandir are its major programs, which have spread new self-confidence without any of the anxiety that alien institutions impose. In the same vein, Swadhyaya is constantly engaged in similar activities that reinforce such confidence. These activities, when replicated over time and throughout the world, have the potential to become a major program. Swadhyayees also embody Swadhyaya's efforts to conserve what was best in tradition, though it may not carry a label such as "sustainable development" or "greening the earth." To cite one example, on 12 July 1993, between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m., swadhyayee couples around the world planted more than eight million saplings, and then tended these plants for a hundred days.

Another ongoing recent experiment relates to the augmentation of water resources for drinking and irrigation through the

desilting and recharging of thousands of wells abandoned over the years. It also involves rebuilding old tanks and creating various types of reservoirs to impound rain water by combining traditional and modern methods based on labor-intensive methods. Labor itself is contributed in the form of shram bhakti.

Through *Bhugarbh Jal Sanchay* and *Nirmal Neer,* the twin projects of water conservation, Swadhyaya is changing the face of semiarid western Gujarat where underground water resources have been all but exhausted. Overuse and blind use of underground water resources has pushed the water table even lower than five hundred feet. By recharging abandoned wells (through replenishing the aquifers) and impounding run-off water in ponds, Swadhyaya has produced dramatic results. Between 1992 and 1995, it has recharged nearly 94,000 wells and built or rebuilt five hundred ponds. Besides raising farm productivity between one hundred and three hundred percent, the cost incurred by Swadhyaya in recharging a well (five hundred rupees) is nearly one-tenth of the cost incurred by official agencies (five thousand rupees).

Many more such activities can be cited, such as enriching the diets of marginal groups or providing health care to them; improving the quality of village life through better sanitation, better drainage, and enlarging the supply of potable water; and spreading non-formal education or raising farm production through eco-friendly techniques, etc. These activities, which may be classified under more than two dozen heads, should not be mistaken for humanitarian activities, for the swadhyayee are not reformers or social workers. However, they do reflect a humanistic culture which is inherent in the divine order to which it subscribes.

Swadhyaya life and message reflect certain recurrent themes. One such theme is the idea of the temple. States and governments, though transient in nature, exist to perform civic functions and to enforce laws framed on behalf of the populace. However, people tend to show greater loyalty to their primordial groups than to the state. Swadhyaya believes that in the Indian context, the temple was the mediating forum for resolving the conflict of loyalties between the primordial affiliations and obedience to external authority. In

past ages in India, in the evening the villagers used to gather at the temple every day, without distinction of caste and status, for prayers and worship, as well as for consultation, counsel and decision. Most of the time gathering at the temple took the form of an informal village assembly. This created a sense of equality and "we" feeling in the community, reinforced the life principle of dharma and strengthened the sense of relatedness.

With the abandoning of temple as a focus for community and the dissolution of community bonds, social cohesion was disrupted. Institutions imposed from above and based on rational principles neither satisfy the material needs nor provide emotional and spiritual sustenance. The resulting social void, made more poignant by the growing economic disparities and the spreading emotional desert, is intensely real. To restore the temples to their original role, Swadhyaya has taken a new initiative; it is building a new kind of temple, called *Loknath Amritalayams* (eternal abode of the Lord of the people).[11]

The villages where Swadhyaya work has taken root, that is, where more than ninety percent of the people are Swadhyaya activists and where the villagers are considered genuinely committed to Swadhyaya, are allowed to build an Amritalayam. They build a simple structure through their shram bhakti from locally available materials. It is thatched with straw, reeds, leaves or any local material used for temporary roofing. It is not enclosed by walls, though a small garden is raised around it.[12]

Each village couple, irrespective of caste origin, gets a chance to work as pujari for a few days in a year. There are morning and evening assemblies at Amritalayam. Non-attendance in morning assembly is accepted. However, all swadhyayees, young and old, men and women, assemble at Amritalayam in the evening. Attendance in prayer service is not some kind of sacrifice, but a positive moral duty. It generally lasts for nearly an hour. After the community prayers, the congregation does not disperse. It discusses individual and collective problems and attempts to sort them out informally. It reviews the progress of various Swadhyaya programs running in the village and gives directions to the persons respon-

sible. The swadhyayee villagers part with a portion of their earnings as an offering to God; they do so anonymously and voluntarily. The collections so received are distributed to the needy in the village as prasad of God, and the surplus in the fund goes for some permanent infrastructure work needed by the village as a whole. Money given to the needy is neither loan, nor help, nor assistance, nor subsidy, nor charity, for it is out of a collection untainted by expropriation or coercion, taxation or donation.

More than a place for remembering God, Amritalayams counterbalance the inorganic political structures as they impinge upon the villagers without confronting them. Amritalayams become the focus of an alternative world of learning and culture, of personal and social renewal, and of a community life independent of the state, which has begun to control it. These are centers where grievances and social problems are sorted out in the spirit of give and take; community spirit of mutual help is reinforced; and initiatives are taken for innovations and reforms. "I" becomes corporative in the Amritalayams to "We." "I" does not shed its individuality; instead it is celebrated in the name and form of the community. The individuality is realized not through surrender but through moderation of ego. Ego is voluntarily subjected to the needs of the community, in line with the precepts of dharma. Amritalayam becomes the center of social and personal renewal. Swadhyaya projects an outlook which has to be internalized at all levels and Amritalayam is the facilitating institution. In short, Amritalayams are centers where the relationship between man and community is revived.[13]

The first Amritalayam was built in April 1980, and now there are more than one hundred. After a few years of bhaktipheri, the villagers get a Swadhyaya *kendra,* an embryonic Amritalayam—a small thatched hall in some part of the village, accessible to all. Subsequently, the village swadhyayees get the chance of Yogeshwar farming and graduate to *Arjun Sabha Ghar,* also called *Parth Preeti,* a more permanent center of Swadhyaya assembly which also doubles as a local office, a site mostly offered by one of the propertied swadhyayees. After few years of these activities, and when more

than ninety percent of the villagers subscribe to Swadhyaya, an Amritalayam is built in that village. More than one hundred villages in Gujarat alone have graduated to the Amritalayam stage and will soon have it.

As pointed out earlier, Swadhyaya has worked and is working amongst the forsaken groups that have been ignored and exploited by the upper strata of Indian, particularly Hindu, society for a long time. The rehabilitative successes of Swadhyaya among such groups is especially significant because it has tried to win over their confidence through selfless love rather than by tempting them with material incentives or hectoring them to mend their lifestyles. In addition to the coastal fishermen, the hinterland disadvantaged groups among whom Swadhyaya is working include *vaghris, aagris, harijans* (legally ex-untouchables), and several similarly marginalized groups.

These groups are understandably distrustful of any outside intervention as highly exploitative. They are largely overawed by mainstream social codes. They attribute their plight to the inherited calling imposed on them by the social system. By the time Swadhyaya reached them, these groups had been fully exposed to all kinds of men, movements and measures that supposedly worked for their emancipation. They were resentful of them. Swadhyaya was seen as just another nongovernmental organization out to exploit them; its rejection of the upper castes–lower castes pollution barrier within the Hindu fold seemed interesting but could well be, they suspected, a deceptive ploy masking a hidden agenda.

In a manner of speaking, Swadhyaya was kept on probation by such groups for quite some time. The persistence of swadhyayees despite initial rejection and suspicion began to make an impact after a few years. This was facilitated because socially and economically notable swadhyayees worked among them without any expectations or demands. The socially and economically depressed communities realized that Swadhyaya's commitment over a sustained period and in the face of rejection and resentment could not have been maintained if their message was not heartfelt. The message of brotherhood began to register, particularly during

frequent bhaktipheris, and when some of these disadvantaged people began to attend study camps and other gatherings of Swadhyaya.

Eventually, these micro-communities began to reappraise their values and position as they probed deeper into the spiritual and social meaning of Swadhyaya, learning Sanskrit verses and absorbing the sense of fraternity under the Swadhyaya umbrella. They became each other's hosts and guests during regular bhaktipheris and periodic study camps. In a land where the sense of social segregation is so acute and ingrained, it was a revolutionary change. Equally revolutionary, and a highly effective way of allaying their fears, has been the new names that Dada has given them. To cite only a few examples, he calls the vaghris and the aagris as *deviputras* (children of goddess), as the mother-goddess has been their chief deity. *Bhavalakshi* (oriented to love) is the name given by him to the depressed castes. Exposure to a different world of dignity and equality first helped them to overcome their sense of victimhood and then restored their faith in themselves and their ability to transcend helplessness, ignorance and poverty.

Compared to the enormity and the extent of the problem, what Swadhyaya has been able to achieve may not be grand in quantitative terms, but in qualitative terms its achievement needs to be appreciated. It has been able to melt away barriers erected over a millennia in the course of a fraction of a generation. It has happened wherever Swadhyaya has gone, and is verifiable. It is winning a battle which was already being given up as lost.

We may return to teerthyatra at this point as an activity independent of bhaktipheri. The pilgrimage may be organized to visit a neighboring holy place (minor pilgrimage) or a major pilgrimage center at a great distance, drawing swadhyayees from all over the country and abroad. The idea is that the pilgrims will spread the message of Swadhyaya on the way, where they stop to take rest, and at the pilgrim center itself. These yatras may take a week or fortnight. Between 1981 and 1995 several scores of teerthyatras have taken place. The crowning teerthyatra took place in March 1986. At Allahabad (Prayag), a major pilgrimage center of India, situated at the confluence of River Ganges and Yamuna in upper

India, the yatra attracted more than three hundred and fifty thousand people from India and abroad. For three days, morning and evening, the vast congregation heard Dada's discourses, which touched on every aspect of the ideas behind Swadhyaya. The intense emotional experience of the yatra is to this day talked about, even in the remotest village from which only a single pilgrim went and then returned to report on his or her experience. In the recently held Bhav Sampark Samaroh (14-20 March 1996), over seventy thousand swadhyayees drawn from eleven states of India and over a thousand from North America, Europe and the Gulf states covered 6,700 villages and a hundred towns, spread over twenty-seven districts of five north Indian states.

Similarly, several *vayasth sanchalans* (a kind of training camp for the more mature swadhyayees in the eighteen-to-forty age group) are held each year at the district or the regional level. Between 1981 and 1995, more than seventy such camps were held, in which more than nine hundred thousand swadhyayees participated. As the individual swadhyayees move from one encounter to another, their awareness that they are engaged in creating a purer community is deepened.

In a world where either the market or the state, or both combining together, has become the sole arbiter of social, economic and political processes, Swadhyaya activities surely seem to reflect quite a different worldview. Its own vision rejects secular ideologies as not only incomplete and inadequate, but also as self-destructive, divisive and incapable of restoring wholeness to man. What Swadhyaya is doing through its various program is to restore man's humanity to him and to correct the severe disequilibrium which afflicts all mankind. It is convinced of its success because its programs start from and are grounded in such beliefs and actions, which are deeply embedded in culture; they stir the deepest feelings of the people. In Dada's own words:

> Religion is the means through which every individual should attain a moral level...where his self-discipline may render the government and the laws unnecessary...The basic revolution

> should be of human mind. The people's outlook on life must be changed...[14]

Dada's conception of impersonal wealth which informs Swadhyaya's socioeconomic experiments is key to an understanding of Swadhyaya's ideal of political economy as well as its key resource, not to speak of the alternative organizational and institutional modes it creates. The idea of impersonal wealth perhaps stems from Dada's reading of Ishawasya Upanishad. At its beginning, there is a question: "Whose is the wealth?" Implicit in the question is the answer that all wealth belongs to God. No body has an exclusive claim on it, not even those who claim to speak for the collectivity. Since all men are children of God and God makes no distinction between them, the political economy must be guided by an idea which can resolve the dilemmas of production (e.g. surplus value, price, alienation, etc.) and distribution (greed, competition, etc.). Swadhyaya believes in the efficacy of impersonal wealth as the ideational force to rectify just that.

The idea of impersonal wealth is not the end of Swadhyaya but it is perhaps its starting point. For Swadhyaya, all wealth, at one level, is impersonal because no one can claim to be the sole producer of a product. At another level it is impersonal because the Swadhyaya process of production is mediated through bhakti. It is apaurusheya in a more fundamental sense. True Lakshmi (wealth) is apaurusheya. But nobody can have it without earning it. In the secular domain, this initiative is rewarded by Lakshmi, but in Swadhyaya the person is also mentally transformed in the sense that the creation of apaurusheya Lakshmi facilitates spiritual transformation. If it is conscious and willing labor, producers become pujaris, work becomes an offering or homage and the produce becomes the prasad. It becomes doubly blessed because yielding the earnings to the whole community becomes a pleasure and so does enjoying the fruits of that sharing, a near-perfect fit between production and consumption. When the swadhyayee is creating impersonal wealth, he or she is paying his or her homage to the Supreme Creator, Yogeshwar.[15]

Impersonal wealth or apaurusheya Lakshmi is regulated neither by need nor by expediency. If it is, it is a mistake. Impersonal wealth is not about equity; it is about culture. Its appeal is based on the belief that unless cultural barriers between human beings are removed through the idea of divine brotherhood and experiments promoting ego-moderation, equality in other realms is nearly impossible to achieve. The core of the problem is the inner transformation of man. Neither the state nor technologically induced economic growth, much less the individual's struggle to satisfy his desires, should violate human ethics. The centrality of dharma is essential for individual and communal good. To realize within oneself the unification of *nivritti* (renunciatory disposition) and *pravritti* (the opposite—an embracing of the material world), moral and material, private and public, spirit and science, is the goal of Swadhyaya, and the idea of impersonal wealth is a powerful medium to reconcile these tensions.

At one level, the various socioeconomic experiments of Swadhyaya, which are designed to show how impersonal wealth works, seek to circumvent dullness, routinization, alienation, greed and invidious competition inherent in material civilization. Dada wishes to correct the flaws of industrial/technological civilization. Dada recognizes that mass production tends to impose external homogenization, uniformity and even regimentation on individuals. The acceptance of industrialism either for utility or under duress does distance people from each other, and this often produces stress, unease and alienation. This stress, in turn, weakens the moral underpinnings of the individual and society. However, for Swadhyaya, the central issue is not mass production or technologically induced economic growth, which largely produce only external changes. These may be benign or malignant, depending on the definition, motive and inclination of those in power. It is the enslavement of the inner self which is much more injurious than the external homogenization brought about by "factory civilization."

For Swadhyaya, it is the inner self which has to be changed, and the agency of moral change can and should be bhakti. If the consciousness of brotherhood of man is strengthened, and spirituality and sociality are reinforced through bhakti, technology can and

must be used for socially productive and creative purposes that will respect the individuality of each participant in the creation of impersonal wealth. Further, the fear of growing reliance of the individual on machinery leading to parasitic tendencies and human exploitation is sought to be countered through kriti bhakti. Kriti bhakti opens the dialogue between economic and social unequals on an equal footing. Only when such emotional allegiance to the idea of bhakti takes place, can technology be used for socially creative ends rather than be guided by the hedonistic calculus of utilitarians or the amoral growth envisaged by the materialists. Swadhyaya is working towards the irreversible imprinting of these values through practical programs of impersonal wealth.

Nevertheless the importance of these programs, whatever evocative name is given to them, lies elsewhere. Dada, it seems, almost teases out experiments and programs from the agglutination of *bhav* (sentiment) and *kriti* (performance) for various experiments. The reason why his ideas seem to be succeeding lies in the nature of participation, problem solving, distributing the benefits of the solution and the sense of efficacy it generates. In this sense, the Swadhyaya idea of impersonal wealth is not of an endless progress; it is an idea of progress that does not want to conquer nature but to live in harmony with it as co-partners in the service of God. Its insistence on living life in fullness and being natural is not an invitation to unrestrained individualism or unrestrained lifestyle, for the individual's inner vision and motivating force is bhakti which links him to his community and through his community to God. In short, these programs reflect attempts to reduce the gap between idea and action, between critical and inventive faculties, and between theory and practice.

Swadhyaya institutions and their growth

Swadhyaya envisions an ideal order, to be sure. But it is not something that can be immaculately conceived, blueprinted and implemented with the help of a well thought out or articulated strategy of transition towards the posited objectives. What it does is to define certain goals, a direction to move towards, and a destination

to be reached. It identifies certain characteristics of consciousness—both personal and collective—and endeavors to build institutions which will reflect these characteristics. However, in doing so, it has to initiate action in a historically given condition and a particular social reality. While the point of departure for Swadhyaya praxis is thus situational and local, it is also the point of eventual return for transforming it in the light of the values it holds dear. Since the obtaining reality incorporates a different set of standards and practices, Swadhyaya efforts are constrained, to a large extent, by these standards and practices. Swadhyaya has, therefore, to create space for itself, to enlarge it and make it coterminous with the whole of the society eventually. The success of this endeavor depends on the extent to which it effectively connects its goals and their institutional expressions, as well as balancing its stated objectives and pragmatic organizational concerns.

But this is not a one-time concern. As Swadhyaya forges ahead and incorporates more and diverse groups, the need for cohesion, coordination and control becomes pressing. However, if centralization of command becomes the operating style, it jeopardizes micro-vitality and local autonomy. It has, therefore, to devise an organizational strategy that allows identity and communication with the larger Swadhyaya community but does not deprive local groups of their autonomy, initiative and enterprise. Devising institutions to cope with the present realities and future contingencies, to hold the far-flung networks of Swadhyaya groups together and to coordinate their activities, without damaging intimacy and spiritual affinity and without eroding the autonomy of the groups, requires great imagination. How has Swadhyaya approached this problem?

The success of the initial bhaktipheris gave Dada and the swadhyayees confidence to forge ahead. It also set the tone for thousands of bhaktipheris which were to follow. The swadhyayees found that these tours strengthened their resolve and confirmed Dada's teachings; the villagers found them stirring and supportive of their deeply held values and beliefs. For more than two decades, bhaktipheri was the mainstay of Swadhyaya. All this while Dada

was, it seems, waiting for the swadhyayees to internalize the message and reach a level of self-development which would allow them to see the social, pragmatic concerns more clearly. He was, in the meantime, creating institutions which would help in the transition into the next phase. From the very beginning Dada saw the strategic importance of swadhyayees retaining autonomy and control over their institutions and their own history, though they have to operate within a framework of secular laws.

Movements tend to atrophy once the initial enthusiasm fades into dull routine or the initial problems the movement confronted seem to be ameliorated. Dada did not want this to happen to Swadhyaya. First, he wanted to test the depth of the enthusiasm of the swadhyayees and to restrain it for some time. He wanted to be sure that the discipline of Swadhyaya was fully internalized and that the followers had not joined Swadhyaya out of any motive other than bhakti in the integral sense of the word. He wanted to move ahead in measured and confident steps. Only rarely did he succumb to the enthusiasm of the swadhyayees. There are two such instances that we know of. One relates to the building of a temple in the erstwhile Portuguese colony of Daman in 1975 at the insistent demand of the local *maachimars* (fishermen), and the other is related to what turned out to be the precursor of Yogeshwar krushi. In the mid-seventies, swadhyayee agriculturists from several villages of Dabhoi Taluka of Baroda District insisted that they would like to contribute their nipunata (in this case, skill as farmers) as their kriti bhakti to God. Dada studied the proposal for more than a year and finally agreed to it.

Dada has enormous patience, as the history of Swadhyaya amply demonstrates. For the first fifteen years or so, Dada allowed his listeners to absorb the idea of self-transformation and concomitant social responsibility. Only in 1958 did he initiate the bhaktipheri program. He waited for another fifteen years before he began unfolding the constructive and socially creative activities of Swadhyaya.

There is a certain rhythm in these activities and this is constantly renewed through listening to the talks of Dada and of other senior

swadhyayees. At the core of it is *Bhagawad Gita Pathshala* (Pathshala in short). Pathshala seeks to impart how to lead an enobling life. It is, in a sense, preparatory school. Dada uses its platform as a philosopher's chair and not as the pulpit for a ministry. Besides his one-hour morning talk every Sunday at Pathshala, the whole day is set aside for meetings, brainstorming, planning, or reviewing the ongoing work or just for intimate conversations. Pathshala is the microcosm of Swadhyaya universe. This continuous circulation and dialogue of activists from Dada down to the village-level worker, and the setting aside of twenty-four days in a year for Swadhyaya work, drives the momentum of Swadhyaya.[16]

In the strict sense, institution-building began with the setting up of Tattvajnana Vidyapith, a residential school of philosophy and humanities, at Thane near Bombay in 1956.[17] Situated on an eleven-acre campus, it runs without any support from the government or philanthropic subvention. Its main programmatic thrust is to combine the best in traditional knowledge and the conventional curriculum pursued in the universities and schools. Besides the Vidyapith, the movement has set up several residential higher secondary schools and vocational training centers in Maharashtra and Gujarat at the insistence of local swadhyayees. However, despite the best efforts and innovative ideas, the linkage with the state education system has proved to be problematic, particularly in terms of curriculum and the recruitment of motivated teachers. While such links are maintained, there is continuous effort to inculcate Swadhyaya values through greater emphasis on non-formal education. There are year-round programs of seminars and training courses for different age groups and for people with different levels of academic achievement. There is also a well-developed and popular seven-year non-degree course at Bhav Nirjhar, a Swadhyaya institution at Ahmedabad. It combines traditional and modern course material as well as vocational training for rural students who enter it at the level of eighth standard with the intention that they will take up their family vocations and Swadhyaya work after completing the course.[18]

In the initial stage, the Vidyapith, Madhavbaug Pathshala, several educational establishments of Swadhyaya which doubled as its organizational wings, and a small nucleus of Bombay-based swadhyayees carried on various administrative and coordinating tasks under the general guidance of Dada. Soon Dada realized that while Swadhyaya was neither by definition nor by conception a corporate body, it could not avoid some kind of organization for a workable and convenient arrangement for handling day-to-day problems. He was equally convinced that these institutions should correspond to the natural units in which people live, namely, the family, and that these institutions should not disturb the familiar patterns of work. In the late fifties and the sixties, Swadhyaya established three administrative bodies, when activities in their respective spheres had started and expanded.

The first body was *Sanskriti Vistarak Sangh* (association for the spread of culture) which coordinates bhaktipheri programs, organizes discussion groups, and arranges minor and major pilgrimages, culminating in two- or three-day camps interspersed with programs or discussion and sundry activities.

Next was *Sat Vichar Darshan* (a center for spreading noble thoughts) to disseminate Swadhyaya literature among the swadhyayees spread all over India and abroad. It publishes three monthlies in Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi which carry the weekly discourses of Dada. These discourses, mostly in the nature of interpretation of one or two shlokas from ancient Indian texts, cover a whole range of social, economic and political issues as they confront modern man. The Sat Vichar Darshan also prints numerous books and pamphlets on various aspects of Swadhyaya, based on Dada's discourses. This is the medium through which swadhyayees, wherever they may be, remain in communication with Dada.

Subsequently, *Jnana Vistarak Sangh* (association for the spread of knowledge) was set up. It is concerned chiefly with managing the formal, non-formal educational and non-degree-oriented vocational institutions of Swadhyaya and the organization of extramural and co-curricular activities around them. Since 1967, it has been organizing and conducting examinations for those swadhyayees

who want to be tested in their knowledge of vedic philosophy, Swadhyaya ideology, logic and literature at elementary, middle and advanced levels. This program is called *Vidya Prem Vardhan* (knowledge or education for the love of it). More than one hundred thousand candidates take these tests every year. Successful candidates are awarded different certificates.

All these organizations are located in a back street of Central Bombay. In these units, there is no hierarchy and not a single paid worker. Swadhyayee volunteers, men and women, depending on their skills, undertake various jobs, from keeping accounts to carrying the mail to the post office, dusting office furniture and mopping floors. These volunteers, living or working in and around Central Bombay, go there at staggered times, on the way to or from the office, during tea break or lunch break, or whenever they can spare some fixed time on a working day for those in a regular job, on a more flexible basis for self-employed workers and housewives, and full time in the case of retired swadhyayees. On an ordinary work day, between two hundred and two hundred and fifty volunteers contribute their shram (labor) bhakti to the movement.[19]

These coordinating bodies are working in well-defined areas, but there are several other activities that have been going on for years without any umbrella organization, for these are local activities and coordinated at that level. To cite some examples: there is *Jeevan Sampada* (life assets), a unit set up for promoting and organizing cultural activities among the swadhyayees in a given area and holding community celebration of festivals. *Dhananjay Kreeda Kendra* (sports clubs named after Arjuna, the legendary archer, sportsman and hero of *Mahabharata*) promotes games and sports. Parivar (family) store is the outlet, recently set up in a few large cities and villages, for the sale of swadhyayee villagers' surplus produce, homemade soaps, matchsticks, milk products, candles and other provisions. *Gauras* (milk produce centers), also recently set up in a few villages, are meant for making milk available to the villagers and for selling the surplus in the form of milk products through outside markets. In Baroda, a center for vocational training for children of swadhyayees in remote, inaccessible areas has

recently been opened. All these centers and activities are responses to urgent community needs. Other local activities, like *Bal Samskar Kendra* (socialization center for children) and *Mahila Kendra* (women's center) have been working in swadhyayee villages for several decades. Children's centers meet every day, mostly under the supervision of a young swadhyayee teacher who supervises their curricular and extracurricular activities. The schedules for meetings of swadhyayee women are decided by themselves. They meet in the afternoon to teach and help each other in domestic skills. Many of these activities revolve around the village Amritalayam or Swadhyaya kendra (center).

One Swadhyaya organization, namely Divine Brain Trust (DBT), needs special mention. It is the only organization bearing an English label. This provides a weekly forum to the university-educated young swadhyayee professionals and businessmen in cities and towns to freely air their doubts, discuss and exchange thoughts around a selected book, article or a problem. These meetings are usually held at the residence of a member. They become instrumental in developing intimacy and family feeling among swadhyayees in large cities. Launched in 1971, the DBTs have spread in big and small towns in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and in its other areas of concentration. Some of its members, who can afford to take extended leave from their jobs, spend two years in a non-degree, postgraduate course at Tattvajnana Vidyapith to acquaint themselves with vedic literature, Indian and Western philosophy, comparative religions, etc. As of now, there are hundreds of such senior and junior centers for postgraduates, undergraduates, college and senior school students. These students add up to thousands.

Swadhyaya inculcates family feeling and fosters community solidarity among its acceptors. This is reflected in its organization. Anyone who takes up any organizational responsibility deems it a privilege and feels more integrated in the family. However, its dense and intensive networks require coordination at various levels. There is always the fear of hierarchic principles of management creeping in. Hence, there is constant deemphasis of hierarchic values both in rituals and in organization. At the district level, an informal

group of activists and senior swadhyayees (in terms of time they can devote) coordinate various activities in their area, and are in constant touch with the Bombay headquarters. Their numbers vary from one area to another. Called *mota bhais* (elder brothers), they have their own resources or they can seek the help of other swadhyayees. The same organizational principles operate at the *taluka* (sub-division) level, where these leaders undertake to coordinate activities in a group of villages of the taluka; they remain in touch with mota bhais at the district headquarters. Then there are *kshetrarakshak* (defenders of locality) who share this responsibility for a couple of villages in their immediate neighbourhood. And, at the village level itself there are *kshetradhars* (foundation of the locality) who have to coordinate activities in the village.

On its organizational side, it is best to cite a leading management educator of India, N.R. Sheth:

> All Swadhyaya activities and programs have so far been planned and implemented without a conventional structure with defined divisions of powers and responsibilities. New ideas are allowed to emerge anywhere in the organization... On the basis of criteria such as seniority, experience and...a person's suitability for a specific task, active workers have been entrusted with the responsibility to coordinate a program..., a project..., a geographical unit..., or a specific social category... A group of mota bhais holding responsibility...are popularly recognised as leading activists and formally enjoy special respect and obedience from others.[20]

For Swadhyaya, the early days of anxiety are over. By and large its restorative and creative efforts are appreciated and its bona fides are accepted in areas where it operates, by swadhyayees and non-swadhyayees alike. As the scope of its activities enlarges and its reach expands, the reality becomes more complex. It is increasingly subjected to the constraints of secular laws and the oversight of governmental audits. It has to deal with a great many official agencies in various states of India. It requires a certain standard of

record-keeping at all levels and more complicated systems of management. All of this tends to displace the older, informal accountability. Spontaneity suffers, corporate ethos begins to intrude, and institutions begin to be much less family-like. So far the institutional network of Swadhyaya has avoided these distortions. Tradition may and does exert its full influence at deeper layers in the shaping of institutions and in facilitating smooth transition from one phase to another. The swadhyayees are alert to these changes. If there indeed has been an organizational principle behind the movement so far, its analogue is family. Not that the families are without differences of opinion *(mata-bhed)*, but sooner or latter they sort it out because of fundamental emotional unity. That is, there is no lack of love *(man-bhed)* and hearts are united, as Dada puts it.

In terms of the scale of incorporation, participation, solidarity, and restitution outside the state framework, Swadhyaya can rightly claim to be a unique contemporary phenomenon, though it makes no such claim. Since the idea of separation of the secular and the ecclesiastical is deeply ingrained in critical minds the world over, religion-oriented visions are avoided in most public discourse. Swadhyaya not only intrudes into public discourse, but also claims a place in the public square because it is both a state of being and a state of action.

In Swadhyaya we are witnessing a fundamentally new kind of non-sectarian social creativity. At the same time its basic ideas have ever been present in India's philosophic literature. The salience of these ideas has engaged many Indian saints and reformers. Where Dada's articulation differs from others is in terms of his effort to blend modern aspirations with traditional sensibilities by assigning active bhakti a central place.

In these pages an effort has been made to show how Swadhyaya has been coping with modernity and the "broken totality" it has brought in its wake. Swadhyaya, which works for total restoration rather than first-aid, is largely active in India for the obvious reason

that it started in India and has been implemented by Indians. But its applicability is global in that it respects plurality and builds on culturally specific inheritances.

Swadhyaya's vision is surely religious, but it is not sectarian or even limited to Hinduism. Its thoughts and actions are a unity. Knowledge of God within and in others is used as a stimulus to constructive work and inspiration to collective action. Without engaging itself in arguments over what is most effective in stimulating social and economic development, its work in the area of sustainable development, equal opportunity, human dignity is commendable and there for all to see.

Swadhyaya's understanding of life, devotion, work, fraternal bonds can best be understood by experiencing the phenomenon of Swadhyaya. It welcomes and encourages such interest so that a sense of ultimate whole—of life, thought and action—may become a transforming experience for those who have an enquiring mind.

Notes

1. Being the message of Pandurang Shastri Athavale to the Colloquium of Intercultural Institute, Montreal, *Living with the Earth,* 1992.

2. Ibid.

3. An English version of these discussions prepared on the basis of notes taken down by his interlocutors is available in *Thoughts on Glorious Heritage,* Bombay: Sat Vichar Darshan Trust, 1975, 2nd edn.

4. See, N.R. Sheth, "Children of the Same God: A Spiritual Approach to Social Transformation". MSS., 1994. Incidentally, Dada has refused to be a trustee in any of Swadhyaya's trusts.

5. Dada is in search of corrective mythologies. His views have to be culled from a series of discourses on the lives of Indian saints, pilgrimage centers, commentaries on vedic scriptures and the Gita, historical themes and plain pedagogic topics. Some of these extempore talks have been published. As one reads through them, a certain viewpoint emerges. It is not what the academics may call objective history. Dada may also not display the finesse of a professional historian, but his interpretation of history, though metaphorized, is a mask of a theory of social order based on dharma. For Dada it is necessary because people need images in actual life situations, and these images define and strengthen the social groups to which they belong.

6. We have already referred to his evocative interpretation of words like kriti, bhakti, and nipunata. Similarly, his interpretation of words like bhakta (one who is undivided), asprashya (untouchable), rakshasa (demon), yajna (sacrificial fire), mandir (temple), Lakshmi (Goddess of Wealth), apaurusheya (divine), vrata (fasting) is novel, attractive and widely acceptable.

7. The growth of Yogeshwar krushi can be seen from the following figures: Number of farms in 1983-84, 11; in 1984-85, 200; in 1990-91, 3648. The number of Yogeshwar krushis has been kept in check since the early nineties as need was felt to consolidate rather than expand.

8. In the Hindu pantheon, Lakshmi or Madhvi, the Goddess of wealth, is the consort of Vishnu. When she showers blessings on mortals, it is incumbent on the receiver to safeguard the divine grace with which he/she has been blessed. Madhvi Raksha Sankalp denotes the resolve of the swadhyayees to do so.

9. A deep-seagoing trawler boat costs nearly half a million rupees. A smaller motorized boat costs nearly 150,000 rupees. A fishing trip on a deep-seagoing trawler takes between five to seven days. A trip on a smaller boat takes about twenty-four hours. After the initial experience of the first two large trawlers, the preference has shifted in favor of smaller boats for several reasons: more fishermen get the chance to offer their kriti bhakti; there is less displacement in their routine; and it is easier for small and poor fishing communities to acquire their Matsyagandha because of their lower capital costs. In the last few years, the swadhyayee fishermen have also bought a few trucks to transport their catch to the cities, and for carrying other items as well. Further, a number of Matsyagandhas get added to the fleet each year.

10. The vedic sages lived in such woodlands.

11. There are about 150 Amritalayams. Gujarat leads in this respect, followed by Maharashtra.

12. In most cases the roof of the Amritalayam has to be relaid every year; villagers devote their shram bhakti for this purpose. This, in turn, reinforces the groupness of swadhyayees.

13. In village after village where the Amritalayams are situated, we have been informed by the villagers that no election takes place for village level political office. The election is unanimous as the decision is taken by the villagers in Amritalayam regarding their candidate. Political office for the swadhyayees has lost its values, its prestige and the attraction of the clout that comes with the office. They are proud of their resolve not to seek favor or charity from anybody (the ayachak vrata), and not to be exploited by any outside agency.

14. Quoted in: Mohammad Vazeeruddin, "Taking Man Closer to Man", *The Sunday Tribune,* 11 March, 1984.

15. See Dada's discourse on Chapter II of *Shevta Upanishad, Tatva Deep,* 19(6), 1987, pp. 2-17 (in Hindi).

16. These twenty-four days represent twenty-four ekadashis, the eleventh day of each fortnight. On ekadashis, Hindus are enjoined to keep fast (upvas). Dada interprets upvas (day of fasting and self-denial) as the time to sit near God—up means near and vas means to sit or reside. Fasting was originally intended to enable men to be free from the daily chores of arranging provisions and cooking. Dada tells his listeners that the best way to remember God and to be near Him is through performing His work and spreading His message, i.e. bhaktipheri.

17. Vidyapith was formally inaugurated by Dr. Radhakrishnan, who pressed Dada to be prudent enough to seek the support of the philanthropists to carry on his work. Dada refused to be prudent because he thought that if God wanted his work to proceed then He would not like him to go around with a begging bowl. See Betty Miller Unterberger, "Radha Krishnan and the Swadhyaya Movement of Pandurang Vaijnath Athavale Shastri" (a paper prepared for a forthcoming collection on contemporary India).

18. These students when they return to their villages have no special privilege, but they serve as effective resource persons.

19. From my personal observation, I can vouch that this constant coming and going hardly disturbs the rhythm of office work.

20. Sheth, op. cit.

Dada's Vision

Transcript of a Talk by
Shri Pandurang Shastri Athavale

Brothers and sisters, torchbearers of knowledge and custodians of peace:

I welcome you in the name of thousands of fellow brothers and sisters of our divine family. Some of the top intellectuals of the world have assembled here after visiting various places where our experiments are being carried out. I welcome you all and I take this opportunity to open my heart about the background of my intention to start the Swadhyaya work.

Man is creating and facing serious social, moral and psychological problems and he cannot run away from this. Self-respect is the spinal cord of human existence and we have lost it. We want to transform human life. I firmly believe that political power, economic prosperity and laws of the state cannot bring about radical or positive changes in man. Theistic thinking is required in every society. Secular tools cannot be successfully used to reform man. I accept religion based on reason. Religion is the only way, but that religion must be based on reason. I want to change the way of life. Surely, wealth and physical pleasure have an important place in human life. However, nowadays, this is the only way of life. We have adopted it as an integral way of life. In earlier times religion

advocated a theistic-based way of life. That is the reason why learned people accepted religion. Unfortunately, religion has become ritualistic and superstitious. Moreover, it has neglected the role of reason in religious life. I also feel strongly that nowadays the main problem is that of the relationship of man with his family and the society around him, the natural world in which he lives, and the Creator to whom he owes his very existence. Today all this has been given a back seat.

Man's dignity is measured in terms of material things, such as power and property. Man himself is devalued. Money, position and possession are upgraded. The position of downtrodden people is worse. They were and are without position and possession and now lead a life of humiliation. That is why they have lost self-respect. I was extremely pained to see people torn and tortured by superstition, blind faith and negative beliefs.

Man is lost. This is certain and supported by facts. Man is alienated from man. Man is alienated from his work and man is alienated from his productivity. Individual man is suffering from various complexes, such as fear and anxiety, inferiority, and superiority, etc.

Ritualistic religion has created barriers that separate people, especially in India. I cannot say whether it is quite this way in other parts of the world or not. This is a very disturbing phenomenon. These psychological and social problems can be overcome by developing faith in the nearness of and unity with God. Then why should anybody be afraid of earthly powers? God is with us. He is not merely with us, He is also active. The same divinity persists in everybody's heart. This awareness helps us to develop brotherly relations with others.

The second problem relates to the most basic and natural unit of society—the family. The family is a school of social values and virtues such as cooperation, regard for others, self-respect, personal affections and gratefulness, etc., but at present we do not see these values in the family. That is the reason why family life is disturbed and even ruined. Youngsters have no regard for elders. Gratitude has no place in their dictionary. The elders and parents largely confine themselves to prohibitions.

Most of these problems are manmade. They can be resolved by bringing human values back into consideration. Economic materialism—a byproduct of industrial revolution—is one of the main sources of social and economic problems. It has given undue importance to money and machine. Our ability to produce goods has grown exponentially but humans have been devalued in the process. Reckless consumerism and commercialism have become rampant.

Social thinkers and reformers have tried to solve human problems, but many of them have given more importance to economic and political considerations. It is easily forgotten that mere political or economic power cannot resolve the human predicament. Man needs to be transformed. This human transformation must begin with individual's outlook towards himself and others. Take, for instance, the issue of equality between men and women. Can this issue be resolved by enacting laws? The answer is "No." Men and women are part of divine creation and the Lord resides in all humans, irrespective of sex, race, creed and community. In our work both men and women work together as responsible and equal persons.

Friends, I have never appealed or asked the state or the wealthy for monetary help. At the center of my ideal world is a kind of man who is touched by grace and who pursues the divine mission in which God is at the Center. Human problems can be solved amicably if we bring in the concept of an indwelling God and devotion to Him. God is never far away from us. He is very much with us. Without His existence we cannot exist. We do not know the working of His methodology. Some Supreme Power is working in and around us. This spiritual truth should be acknowledged regularly and remembered by man. This generates self-respect and self-confidence in any man or woman. At the same time, such a man or woman cultivates reverence for others in the world. Such genuine theistic thinking should stress positive values and virtues. This active faith in the proximity of God can be utilized to solve the problems of all needy people. But, if this spirit is to be inculcated in people, isolated individuals relying on their own resources cannot easily do it. An organization of such like-minded people is

necessary. Nowadays we come across many associations and organizations working for material welfare of men. Most of them have become commercialized or bureaucratized. Even human relations have been commercialized. Philosophers and thinkers like Bertrand Russell and Jean Paul Sartre rightly assert that organizations tend to kill individuality and stifle personal initiatives. There is some truth in their contention.

We have not formed any formal organization to do the work of integrated development of man. We have formed a family—the largest family in the world. Family is a natural unit in any society. And our family is divine. Formation of any family requires a single father. The unseen God who generates and operates our body is our father. God is one and can be called by many names. Indwelling God is the heart of this large family and we are all his children. We are trying to cultivate this idea in the society. The question is: what is life? Life is give and take. In family alone we can talk with self-respect and dignity. Grateful acceptance can be experienced in a healthy family and we are trying to cultivate this attitude.

The other problem is of economic inequality. All cannot be economically equal, but the problem of "haves and have-nots" is a real one. I think this problem can be solved by accepting the role of God in our entire life, including our economic affairs. He is present and active in our life. So there is a share of God in our economic earnings too. If we accept this principle and start keeping aside his share, we can have wealth of God which can be used for the good of the needy. Our Amritalayams (hut-temples projects) are these social and economic centers trying to solve social and economic problems of the people in a healthy manner. Besides, we have established Yogeshwar krushis and Matsyagandhas. Farmers of a village take up a farm and cultivate it as a divine farm. Thus they serve God by contributing their labor to Him. This offered labor is divine. It neither belongs to an individual nor to a group. It is purely impersonal wealth, which is distributed to the needy brothers and sisters as divine gift, the prasad.

Shree darshanam is another farming project which involves about twenty villages. Some decades back, I had read Lao Tze's concept of a "completely self-sufficient village." His ideal village did not have any contact with others or the outside world. Lao Tze's idea is laudable, but, then, why should a self-sufficient village be completely isolated from other villages? Our project aims at self-reliant villages which can have a relation of affinity with other villages. Our twenty villages in a basic unit constitute one family whose members are involved in the production of impersonal wealth which can be utilized for the betterment of needy human beings anywhere. However, be sure, that is not charity.

We also try to resolve the problems of the employer-employee relationship. This is a burning problem now. The just rewards of the laborer should be given gracefully to him or her. Labor is invaluable because the divine also works with the worker. Both the employees and the employers should recognize this truth and act accordingly. The employer visits the employee's house in order to return the rewards of their labor. This approach maintains the dignity of both and promotes brotherly atmosphere.

Friends, basically I am concerned with the problem of inner transformation of man. Desirable socioeconomic changes cannot be brought about by merely changing social and political systems. It can be brought about through human transformation, which begins with an individual person. It should always be like this. Besides, man has many needs other than economic. He has psychological needs, such as the need for identity, the need for belonging and the need for emotional warmth. The alternative way of life presented by me can meet these needs.

Friends, this alternative way of life can only be developed by accepting and practicing reason-based religion and a theistic way of life. And, for this type of transformation in individual and social life, we have accepted God. Do not keep God in heaven. Do not keep God in temples and churches. Bring God with you. He works with you. He stays with you. Be sure we will never be aloof from God; maintaining closeness to God, according to my knowledge, is bhakti or devotion. That is why bhakti is a powerful social force.

Challenges to Learning from the Swadhyaya Movement

Anthony J. N. Judge

Evaluation and praise for the Swadhyaya movement have been presented most effectively in other papers and documents. It suffices to say that any movement that successfully involves large numbers of impoverished villagers in the Third World, empowering them to improve their own quality of life, merits careful attention. This is even more true when such a movement refuses any external, official or foreign resources. The question is whether lessons of relevance to other cultures may be learnt from such initiatives—and how.

Although primarily based on the western coast of India, the movement defies simplistic definition. As expressed by one sympathetic scholar, R.K. Srivastava of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (New Delhi):

> Swadhyaya is neither a cult nor a sect; it is neither a party nor an association; it is neither messianic nor limited to a particular section of society; it is neither directed against centralising state power nor to overcoming flaws in Indian society, though such consequences may follow. Swadhyaya is both a

> metaphor and a movement. It is a metaphor in the sense of a vision, and a movement in terms of its orientation in social and economic spheres. (1986)

Building on qualities long articulated within the Hindu spiritual tradition, emphasis is placed on the quality of relationships between people, especially within the context of the most impoverished villages. This has led to a remarkable, and growing, capacity to regenerate village life. Refusing any economic assistance from either the Indian government or foreign sources, Swadhyaya has made unusual achievements in thousands of villages, even in such physical terms as replenishing wells and managing farms. The exceptional quality of the initiative has been confirmed by the former Iranian representative to UNESCO, Majid Rahnema. (1990)

Westerners usually expect others to learn from them and tend to be insensitive to the problems those in other cultures experience in the process. The case of the Swadhyaya movement highlights some of these cross-cultural learning problems as they might by experienced by Westerners.

Challenge to learning

Movements tend to have founders. Whether a single individual or a group, the role of leadership tends to be a key factor. It is through that role that a new cognitive frame is explicated and rendered credible so that people can act through and out of it in fruitful ways. But beyond the intellectual skills of explanation are those other qualities which inspire and touch people. Ultimately it is these which are the catalyst of any action and the guarantor of continuity through difficult times, especially at the beginning.

Such generalities are as true in the West as in the East. And in both hemispheres the charismatic qualities of leadership play a key role. The personality of a leader is important. Whether in the political, religious, scientific, artistic or military spheres, the image of the leader acquires special significance. In the West, political campaigns are built around such images. They are a major focus for religious

activity. The "psy-op" specialists in military campaigns mobilize popular support through image-building around a key general or other figure—often in opposition to some suitably demonized opponent. In the artistic and cultural spheres, advertising centers on media personalities, whether popular or high-brow. This has also been true of civil rights campaigns and is evident in the successful strategy of the Right Livelihood Award.

The challenge is to understand the implications of such leadership dependence for replicability of successful social initiatives, especially from one cultural context to another. For leadership of a grassroots movement to be successful, it must necessarily be embedded in the local cultural tradition. It is precisely this embedding which is a challenge to comprehension and replicability elsewhere. Beyond appreciation of the exotic, leaders from other cultures are not necessarily credible as leaders outside their context—however much they may be appreciated for their integrity, power, accomplishments or human qualities.

But if leadership is in some respects vital to the success of social movements, then it is important to understand the constraints on the wider growth of such movements in the light of cultural constraints and boundaries. Are the learnings of a successful social movement in one context transferrable, or applicable, to another cultural context? And if so, to what degree? And what should carefully be filtered out of any transfer process?

The point could not be more sharply made than by the electoral reverses in 1995 to what is now termed in Eastern Europe the "so-called democratic reform movement." Democracy, advocated by western experts and enthusiasts as of self-evident value, and a prime condition of assistance, has not been experienced by a significant proportion of the population as justifying the pain of social disruption, violent criminality, impoverishment and loss of social security. Who made the assumptions on which such misjudgements were made?

Social movements as communities of discourse

The Swadhyaya movement is an example of a community of discourse. It was the discourse engendered by the founder, notably amongst an initial group of nineteen, that set the pattern for future development. A remarkable key factor was the encouragement given to participants to wander the villages, as a form of pilgrimage, purely to enter into dialogue with villagers. This remains a key activity of the movement, with sophisticated townspeople devoting part of their spare time to visiting the humblest villages on foot and simply entering into dialogue with people in an informal way over an extended period of time—possibly years. In no way is it a question of giving speeches and responding to queries.

In contrast to western perception of missionary activity, such as the courageous door-to-door initiatives of the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses, the emphasis in this Indian movement is not to impose a particular belief system. Rather the purpose is to evoke a bond and to involve others from the village in the pattern of discourse. Essentially the discourse is "non-directive," although clearly it is difficult to grasp what this might mean across cultures, especially in the case of cultures which are already non-directive in western eyes.

But although non-directive in many respects, the dialogue is clearly intentional in the case of the Swadhyaya movement. Beyond evoking bonds, whether with visitors or between villagers, a concern is with how the villagers might better help themselves with their own resources in response to the challenges and problems of their daily lives—in the absence of any external assistance. Such assistance is in most cases unavailable anyway or, if this is not the case, is subject to suspect, or unwelcome, conditions and constraints.

The challenge for the visitors is to find ways of evoking a reframing of the ways in which the villagers see themselves and their constraints and opportunities. This cannot simply be a cognitive game. It must build on the culture and belief system—in this case, of Hindu rural India. Patterns of meaning have to be evoked,

and have to be reinforced, in order to acquire legitimacy. Clearly storytelling can be a major vehicle of exchange and has always been viewed as such. In that context, many such stories are derived from myths, legends and spiritual tales. In India, the spiritual dimension is of major significance, even in the most impoverished environments, if not especially in such environments—whether or not it is to be labeled by outsiders as pure superstition.

The challenge for the visitors is to encourage the villagers to develop a language that sustains any village initiative to refocus community energies.

The challenge of language

Internationally, professional groups are increasingly perceived as communities of discourse. This is also true of religions, as it is true of the financial, business, military and diplomatic communities. It is readily understood that in each case people "speak the same language." Much does not need to be said.

Encounters between such communities of discourse, however, are as fraught with misunderstanding as those between speakers of Japanese and Gaelic. In addition, within any given community of discourse there tend to a multitude of variants. "Accent" is as important as in any class-oriented society. One group of psychotherapists disdains to speak with another. The hard sciences disdain the efforts of the softer sciences. The lack of meaningful communication between religious faiths is currently at the root of some forty regional conflicts.

Nevertheless the development of language is considered of such vital importance that one director of an MBA program saw its role as teaching students a new language. In the most radical corporate training programs, efforts to do this (notably in Japan) are designed to have a greater impact on a person's personality and sense of identity than at a military training camp.

Much more controversial is the use of language by what are casually labeled as "sects." Much publicity is given to the ways in which unsuspecting teenagers and young adults are "programmed"

through their participation in such groups. Warnings are given concerning the manipulative skills of unscrupulous "gurus" supported by an unusual degree of peer-group pressure—even leading to suicide pacts (e.g., Ordre du Temple Solaire) or mass poisoning (e.g., Aum). No effort is made however to compare or distinguish such processes from those that occur in other communities of discourse, including state-sanctioned "death squads"; the tragic strategic stupidities of World War I trench warfare; or the questionable heroism of the "Charge of the Light Brigade". Nor is any effort made to distinguish such "sects" from those viewed complacently by the establishment (e.g., the Freemasons, Opus Dei, or student fraternities with their dubious initiation procedures). The inflammatory logic of religious fundamentalists is also excluded from such comparisons, even when it leads to assassination, as in the case of Jewish fundamentalists (e.g., Rabin); death threats, as in the case of Muslim fatwas against writers and intellectuals; or the execution of pro-choice doctors by Christian fundamentalists.

The key questions are: what innovation in language and reframing is appropriate to social change; how are abuses to be identified, and when are they to be seen as counterproductive?

The efforts in the West in favor of "political correctness" in language as an essential foundation for social change have both valuable and ridiculous dimensions. Only history will have the perspective to determine in what ways they are counterproductive—and meaningless to cultures which do not make, or attach equivalent importance to, the labeling criticized.

A special challenge of communities of discourse, and especially those that isolate themselves by their particular use of language, is the tendency to be somewhat indulgent in consuming their communication products. The use of video recording has enabled communities to build up community memory in ways that were impossible in the past. Repeated showings of such recordings usefully reinforces a sense of community. The question is at what point this becomes an indulgence and counterproductive.

The leadership challenge

For a Westerner constantly exposed to the politics of manipulative leadership, and to the rhetoric concerning the merits of the democratic process as a check against its defects, leadership itself is naturally a challenge. Whilst new leaders may be hailed and welcomed, like Bill Clinton, their qualities are constantly subject to microscopic examination and challenge. It is accepted that, as part of the natural course of events, many former adherents will sooner or later lose their enthusiasm. Few western countries have a leadership of enduring popularity. Authority figures are quickly viewed with cynicism, however much they may have been favored in the past. Folk heroes, notably in sport and popular music, flourish only because they are not tested by the realities to which other authority figures are constantly expected to respond.

And yet the media in the west is entirely dependent on the focus on leaders and authority figures, however temporary. The reality of the moment is articulated in relation to such personalities and cult figures as reference points. In many countries, portraits of the key national leader, whether president or monarch, are widely displayed in public buildings. (It is characteristic that the most common recent focus of worldwide attention, quantitatively at least, has been the drama of the private lives of the British monarchy.) Media "talk show" hosts, as trusted figures, articulate and orient popular dialogue with increasingly devastating power, far exceeding that of many politicians. Product advertising is most successful through endorsement by popular figures. Elites are extremely sensitive to the key figures in their particular milieux, whether in terms of attending social events and conferences, or approving fashions, theories, values or programs. Such "elites" also exist among alternative development movements which also cultivate their heroes and role models.

All this suggests that it may be totally simplistic for Westerners to question the way in which charismatic, powerful or articulate personalities continue to influence their lives and their lifestyles. Care therefore needs to be taken in endeavoring to understand the

role and behavior required of leaders of any popular social movement—especially in other cultures deprived of the luxury of what is considered normal western media coverage.

In this period of multiple social challenges and crises, it is therefore useful to ask the hypothetical question of Westerners: "What kind of leadership would be necessary and acceptable in a social movement responding effectively to the conditions of the marginalized, the unemployed, and those falling through the social safety nets?" For it is clear that that which is provided by conventional political systems, including the European Union and the United Nations, has proved abysmally inadequate to the challenge. It has certainly failed to inspire all but those who are ill-prepared for the realities of the deception which tends to follow from any belief in the promises made.

The spiritual challenge

Development as propounded by economists, and embodied in development programs by intergovernmental agencies, has never had any spiritual dimension. Such development deals with objective economic and, occasionally, social conditions. The cultural dimensions of development have only been accepted very late in the process—and with the greatest reluctance. The track record of development programs as a whole has verged on the disastrous. Much effort has recently gone into retrofitting structural adjustment programs with "a human face." It is now being recognized how much environmental damage has been caused by development.

Recent decades have increasingly highlighted the degree to which, even in "developed" countries, society has become alienating. Stress and marginalization are increasingly evident. Violence is rapidly increasing, with its consequence for personal insecurity. The drama of family and community breakdown is widely discussed, especially in relation to the young. Religions have proved largely impotent in response to these conditions.

Under such circumstances, in the impoverishment of Indian villages, how is it possible that a social movement recognizing a

spiritual dimension should "take"? Were it merely a question of religious celebration, as is so often the case in the West, this would not be a cause for comment—merely another case of religion as an opiate for the people. Like it or not, the challenge to understanding lies in the fact that the spiritual dimension emerges within the Swadhyaya movement as a key factor in reframing the relation between people such as to catalyze community renewal.

The joy and sincerity of such relationships can easily be romanticized in western eyes, inured as they are to the calculating falsity of many social relationships in the West. But can a useful comparison be made with the sense of community cultivated by many church groups in the West—especially those known as charismatic? There too, surely, there is a shared joy and a special bonding? Is this not an important dimension of the Christian Coalition in the USA, just as it is important to certain Catholic groups, and religious communities? And also in certain sects, of course.

What exactly is it that gets sustained and enhanced in such settings and how can it become basic to community self-renewal? There are clearly many answers to this question, as well as many attempts to impose particular answers, notably those based on spiritual dogma and sacred literature. It is difficult to filter out the appropriate from the inappropriate. But the question then is surely "appropriate to whom," and who is it that has the wisdom—and the right—to do the filtering? Development economists? Just as people are drawn to different religions and spiritual experiences—if they are drawn at all—so surely they may be expected to have different criteria by which to judge the bonding they find meaningful and fruitful.

At this point of social crisis, would it not be appropriate to say that if it works for a given community—according to their own assessment—then that is to be welcomed? The tragedy is that there is little understanding of how the varieties of spiritual experience can prove meaningful, and under what conditions. The difficulty is that religions have such a heavy investment in inculcating dogma, that actual spiritual experience is ignored—if not deliberately treated as illusory.

The challenge for a Westerner exposed to the spiritual context of the Swadhyaya movement is the directness of the spiritual acknowledgment, apparently uncluttered with dogma and non-experiential referents. It is one thing to treat the spiritual dimension of an individual as an article of dogma, it is quite another to greet people through their spirituality, recognizing the godhead in them as a mirror of the godhead in oneself. Of course this can evoke unending internal dialogue with oneself concerning the nature and degree of illusion associated with this process—and whether it is really distinct from equivalents in western settings. It may indeed be the case that it is the exotic which catalyzes a sense of freshness, spontaneity and sincerity, where otherwise only cliche and patterned behavior would be perceptible. For intellectuals there may also be advantages in being unable to understand the language—a Catholic argument for the traditional service in Latin! It is then the directness of the experience which is the focus of attention.

There are few answers to questions concerning the role of spirituality in sustainable development. But there are many unanswered questions. These have tended to be ignored or dismissed as irrelevant, notably by those whose incompetence in designing sustainable development programs has only been matched by their arrogance and complacency. The Swadhyaya movement has broken new ground in this respect and deserves attention.

The challenge of deference

In the so-called liberated societies of the West, authorities of any kind are now subject to constant scrutiny and challenge. Courtesy and respect are usually merely cosmetic—adopted for the occasion, especially to ensure one's personal advancement. Employees are instructed in codes of courtesy in order to improve customer relations. It is overt behavior which counts, not the degree of sincerity governing it. The elderly are seen as close to the scrap heap and are avoided to the extent possible. The deference originally shown by men to women is falling victim to programs of political correctness.

In many eastern cultures, the pattern is quite different. Deference, notably towards the elderly, is a major feature of social relationships. This is extended to those acknowledged as religious elders, and especially to spiritual authorities and gurus. How strange to see company directors, magistrates and other professionals literally on their knees before a guru. What purpose is served? Who is kidding whom? What can be said of a context in which people scurry to satisfy the smallest whim of the leader?

But these patterns have not been lost in the West. Anyone exposed to behavior around key figures in government can attest to the cultivation of this mode by people interested in keeping their jobs (if not their lives) and advancing their careers. It is said that the reason Stalin was applauded at such great length on any formal occasion was the mortal risk to those who first curtailed their enthusiasm. Such activity is not confined to the entourage of dictatorships, it is evident in most developed countries—and it is replicated in many major corporations, as well as in the academic environments of the most advanced countries. The attitude of social and other elites to bearers of awards, orders of merit, and decorations, deserves reflection in this context.

Such behavior has also been evident in the attitude to religious figures in the West, notably in relation to the Catholic hierarchy. It is only very recently, and against tremendous resistance, that the sexual scandals associated with the Catholic priesthood have started to emerge in a number of countries. The point to be made is that deference on the part of the guileless is easily abused. Investigations in the U.K. have recently demonstrated the abuses perpetrated by unscrupulous Muslim pirs on defenseless women who are brought to them for spiritual guidance and do not dare to protest. The Indians themselves have great tolerance of those who claim to be gurus and of those who choose to show deference to this or that guru. For, ultimately, from whom are there not important spiritual lessons to learn?

It is clear, however, that deference can be abused. Vigilance is required. But it is also clear that there are circumstances under which deference is appropriate. Inability to show deference is itself a weakness.

Again the question to westerners: "What kind or degree of deference might be appropriate to the acknowledged leader of a social movement?" Elements of the answer are to be found in the fulsome phrases offered when introducing a key speaker at any international conference on social change. The organizer needs to engage in this process to justify the presence of the speaker and to establish the value of the event. The audience needs the fulsome presentation to justify its attention and to evoke an ability to learn. Such focused deference may constitute a vital keystone to the social integration of the movement.

Is it appropriate to begrudge the impoverished the behavioral expressions that they favor in response to a leader of a movement responding to their needs? Is enough known about the transference processes that occur under such circumstances and their role in enabling social transformation?

But questions may also be usefully asked as to the need of the speaker for such deference and praise. However, ultimately these are problems for the leader. After all, the art of being a leader may lie in knowing how to act as the focus of collective attention. Whether the leader is attached to the process of praise and adulation, or detached from it, may be of little consequence for the achievements of the movement. Dependence on such deference, if any, may be more a challenge for the leaders's own development.

Clearly, such deference as required behavior may be experienced as problematic from the perspective of other cultures. It is perhaps the case that deference emerges, and is expressed, in different ways in different cultures—perhaps more overtly, or less overtly.

The Swadhyaya movement is highly unusual in India in that it results in the mixing of castes in ways that are normally totally unacceptable—and even forbidden—under conventional Hindu practice, as being a source of spiritual impurity. This cuts through a conventional western view of deference as being associated with hierarchy of some kind. At its simplest and most spontaneous, there is a charm to deference voluntarily chosen as a mode of behavior. As such it may be seen as performing important functions in facilitating relationships which might otherwise be difficult. And why

should courtesy, expressed in that form, not have a key role in social transformation? Have those associating social transformation with radical interpersonal frankness been that successful?

The challenge of continuity

The challenge for the leadership of a social movement is to ensure its long-term continuity, beyond the life of the founder and of those directly influenced by him or her. Among western psychotherapists, for example, the deference and awe still accorded to those who knew Jung (or Freud), or were students of students of Jung (or Freud), raises questions concerning the nature of the movement that they inspired.

In the case of the Swadhyaya movement, the visible achievements are at the village level and in the villagers themselves. The challenge lies in the nature of any dependence on leadership at other levels and the ability of the leadership to avoid sclerosis. When intractable differences can be referred to a distant leadership, whose wisdom and judgement is not questioned by either party, then the social movement is not endangered. But when the leadership becomes bureaucratized, after the charismatic period of growth, then the movement is faced with the challenges of many conventional organizations. It is then in danger of losing its spirit, shifting from spontaneity to form.

The Swadhyaya Movement is still young and has not yet been faced with this challenge. But it is possible that, even if any central group is unable to perform a role in conflict resolution, the spirit of the movement can continue to operate at the village level.

But again, given the fads and fashions which have governed western thinking on improving corporate life over recent decades, any movement which can maintain its integrity over decades is already performing better than might otherwise be expected. New impulses may emerge to redefine the movement. Perhaps the challenge to learning is to determine to what extent the existing phase of the life of a movement is open to new influences, rather than dependent on the image the movement has built up of itself and its undoubted successes.

References

Dror, Yehzkel. "The Capacity to Govern" (Report to the Club of Rome, 1995-6)

Judge, A. J. N. "Sustainable Dialogue as a Necessary Template for Sustainable Global Community" (Paper for the Academy of Management conference on "Organization Dimensions of Global Change: no limits to cooperation," Case Western Reserve University, 1995)

Judge, A. J. N. "Cultivating Sustainable Psycommunities: recognizing the psychosocial integrities of the future" (Report on the international conference on "Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities: Models for 21st Century Living," Findhorn, 1995)

Judge, A. J. N. "Policy Options for Civil Society through Complementary Contrasts" (Paper for a Seminar on State and Society at the Russian Public Policy Center, Moscow, 1994, under the auspices of the Council of Europe)

Judge, A. J. N. "The Future of Leadership: reframing the unknown," *Futures,* 26, 1994, 10, pp 1086-1105

Rahnema, Majid. "Swadhyaya: the unknown, the peaceful, the silent yet singing revolution in India." Theoule, France. 1990

Srivastava, R K. "Swadhyaya Movement: its meaning and message" (Paper presented to the a seminar of the United Nations University, Rome, 1986). Delhi, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

Talwalkar, D S. "Swadhyaya's Approach to Empowerment: two case studies" (Paper for Conference on Hunger and Poverty, Brussels, 1995)

Swadhyaya in a Broader Context

Theodore H. Koff

The following observations on my introduction to Swadhyaya reflect the thoughts and learning experience of a single individual at a particular point in time. A bit of background may therefore be useful to provide a context for a deeply moving personal encounter.

I come from the Southwestern part of the United States, a portion of the country inhabited by many native Americans also known to us as Indians—because in the fifteenth century a misguided explorer thought he had arrived in India. To a large extent these people have been displaced persons, rejected by an encroaching foreign population, severely impoverished, unable to cultivate the land and too often alienated from their own traditional governments as well as from the national system of administration that governs them by default. But there are many more similarities than the sharing of a name. Members of these impoverished disenfranchised segments of the United States population in many ways are comparable to the disenfranchised impoverished population I saw in India. Poverty and alienation from the larger society are not solely the plight of the Indians of North America. In my country,

despair and alienation also are found among many ethnic minority groups as well as persons identified as belonging to the majority. The alienation is evidenced by reliance on drugs, criminal activity, and the disintegration of the family. Self-reliance and family support is replaced by losses: the loss of pride, of self-respect, of regard for home and family and society. We all too often witness the disintegration of the individual as a result of the adverse effects of the destructive social environment in which some people live. The positive nurturing values of trust, love, home and family that all contribute to a positive image of the self all seem to be missing in these individuals.

There is widespread expression of disdain for the central government much like what I observed in my brief visit in India, where it became evident in the absence of expectation of government's performance on citizens' behalf. When a roof was blown off a home during a storm it was hoped that government would respond to the emergency but, in fact, government appeared not to be there when needed. Such a negative experience can only contribute to the absence of a sense of community, to the devaluation of the importance of the individual.

In contrast, we saw how each member responded to the needs of others in their community, their village, demonstrating the bonds between them. Such a sense of community is built upon unquestioned positive regard for others, to leadership the villagers have selected and respect, and to the acceptance of interdependence.

My personal area of interest and study deals with issues involving older people in a society where scientific advances and public health improvements have enabled large numbers of individuals to live very long lives. We have rid ourselves of many of the infectious diseases that formerly interrupted life at young ages and have in turn created a population of older persons who often have become physically and emotionally dependent. Many of these older persons, because of their chronic illnesses and the absence of family supports or of adequate financial resources, have become financially impoverished and dependent upon the state for financial support. Many have also become socially impoverished because of family

disruption, absence of a productive role in the society and having come to believe that they may be a burden for family and society—even a cause of family or societal disruption. One way the values of a society can be measured is by observing the way it treats its elders.

What is it that ties together these thoughts about my visit to India, the plight of American Indians and other impoverished groups and my concern for older persons?

I want to return now to my visit to India and some of the testimonials I was privileged to hear, individual testimonials in which the same message was repeated with sufficient frequency and consistency to convince me to accept it as representative of the entire group of Swadhyaya.

I can clearly see a very young woman rise to speak with a maturity far beyond her chronological years and tell how the movement had created in her a sense of worth and dignity. When I tried to see a comparable picture of a member of an impoverished group in my country—regardless of age—I found an image hard to recall. This young woman exuded a sense of self-worth and maturity that suggested inner peace and an ability to communicate clearly what she needs from family and community.

I can clearly see a tall man stand to speak to us and tell how life had changed for him since his village had joined the Swadhyaya. The people were the same, the geography was the same, but the village was totally different. Before this social and religious transformation, he had felt alone in the midst of the village but now he felt at home and at peace in the environment of his neighbors. He clearly reflected on the idea of the "lonely crowd" where the meaningful quality of relationships is built not upon the number of people present but rather on the quality of the relationship among them. In the case of this man, and others like him, what changed was a belief in personal worth and value to the community. He was transformed through his belief that he was a personification of God and that, like him, God exists in all of his community, where all are therefore to be valued and respected. He, like the young woman described earlier, had found a new inner strength

and could convert this strength to a force for social good in his community and thereby express his gratitude to the Creator.

I still feel the presence of a man who declared that before Swadhyaya he would prey upon his neighbors, robbing them of their belongings and even causing physical harm without experiencing any remorse. That was his way of life. His life lacked any moral values; he was self-centered and totally disregarded the rights of others, even though they were his neighbors. Life was without order, was rebellious and sporadically dependent upon his ability to commit crimes. He recognized no justice nor law and order nor was there peace or happiness in his life. Having undergone a transition to a new way of life he was able to point out other members of his community who had been the very same persons he had abused and to apologize to them. He now lived with these same persons as members of a family in which he gave and received help from others and shared in the common bond among the members. His change came through a renewed belief in his own value, his belief in God and conviction that God resides in him and in others. He therefore had become equal to all others as they were to him and a new bond had been created. Everywhere I went I heard conversations replete with tales of past lifestyles built upon alcoholism and ensuing destructive behavior, of physical and emotional abuse, especially spousal abuse from husband to wife. Families had been abandoned by the wage earner, as were farms and means of productivity. Poverty was rampant and opportunities for an enhanced lifestyle were minimized by cycles of destructive behavior, much as apparently continues to prevail throughout the world. For the Swadhyaya villages, such behaviors have been replaced by the introduction of a new vision of the value of the individual, acknowledgment of the significance of God in each person and accomplishments made possible by a new spirit of shared responsibility for one another and for the community. The entire world is in need of this important message of the value of the person and the productivity of sharing together in peace.

I am aware that life expectancy in India is far shorter than in the United States. It is likely to be shortest for those who are most

impoverished, and for those who are most alienated from their government. American Indians also have a shorter life expectancy, suffer impoverishment and feel alienation from the American government. That government made a bond with the American Indians to provide the services necessary to assure a healthy and productive life style, a bond that has been broken by the non-performance of the government. American Indians have responded with new initiatives that enhance their self-determination. I expect that what I saw and heard in India demonstrated a comparable anguish at having been neglected by a government that should be responsible for the safety and welfare of all of its citizens. As a positive outgrowth of this societal neglect, a new social organization has arisen. It is the new self-determination movement known as Swadhyaya. It seems to me that nowhere in the world would it be more appropriate and valuable to export the concepts of Swadhyaya than to native populations of any origin, especially to the American Indians.

Yet, regardless of what age is considered to be "advanced," there are elders in every society. When I asked to know more about how the elders of the Swadhyaya villages were regarded, I was presented with the opportunity to meet the revered elder of a particular village. He told me that, although he could not keep up with the pace of work that had typified his younger years, he had a role that he felt was very important and he continued to be a contributing member of the society. The message he communicated was that his being older contributed to his continuing value in the community and gave it increased significance. He implied that his individual experience was not unique to him nor this village but represented the way older persons were valued by their associates.

I also noted that accompanying a great sense of success was a certain arrogance that may have led to actions resulting in isolation from other communities and especially from the governmental structures that relate to the villages. This may be appropriate behavior, considering the great success of the villages, the absence of support from the governmental agencies and evidence that villages which have not adopted Swadhyaya have continued their

non-constructive behavior. However, the continued success of the villages and of the movement should lead to greater community understanding of the values of Swadhyaya and support for its continued success. Essentially, the movement has to broaden its borders to encompass larger segments of the rural population.

What I observed and described here is the presence of a great social movement designed to return a sense of dignity and hope to a segment of the population that had been in despair. My personal exploration into the reasons for the success led me to some of the following thoughts.

Societies' elders

Sages have remarked that if we save one person it is as if we saved the entire world. This thought occurs to me in the context of my observations because it highlights the importance of the individual. Because society is built upon a group of individuals, each individual is the most significant component of the total value of the entire community.

One of the major problems with the aging of our society is a tendency to devalue older persons. We have not identified an appropriate role or place in the society for those older who no longer participate in the work force. We attribute value to productivity rather than to the importance of the individual. If God resides in each individual then God probably does not vacate the individual simply because the individual is no longer employed. Why this should be the case is the real question for me as a gerontologist. I suggest that we can learn from the Swadhyaya movement some beliefs that might enable other societies to understand and appreciate the value of older persons.

I do not refer only to our ascribing value or absence of value to the aged. More important is developing a commitment to the inherent value of each individual in our society. For this reason it seems to me that gerontologists need not only to advocate on behalf of older people but to be at the forefront of advocacy on behalf of all people, especially those who otherwise would be

devalued by the society in which they live. For example, advocacy should be directed on behalf of disabled persons of any age, of single parents struggling to make a home for their children, of troubled youths unable to find their place in the world, of the unemployed and of those who lack funds to purchase the basic necessities of life. The question then arises concerning who will then advocate on behalf of the older person if our energies are broadly directed to all who are in need?

Clearly the Swadhyaya response would be that if we commit society to the reverence of the person then there ultimately will be no need for special advocacy for the elderly. I believe that this is what I saw demonstrated in village after village where older persons, irrespective of age, were treated no differently than others. Every individual was revered as one among the many.

A troubling issue in our society today is that we argue for support of older persons on the basis of their previous contributions to the society. We proclaim that they parented the subsequent generation; they created the stable infrastructure; they developed the economy that many of us enjoy and so on.

All of this may be true when we generalize to the entire population. Yet these arguments are counterproductive, because if we applied these criteria to every older person we would find many who do not qualify. Indeed, we find this ideology contrary to the basic tenet of entitlement, which holds that older people are deserving beneficiaries of society's largesse because they have reached a certain age. It does not matter what their contribution to the infrastructure may have been, what role they may have played in the political scene, whether they have produced offspring for the future generation, or fought in any wars. They are legitimate recipients only because they are somebody.

Too often older persons are portrayed as burdens on society, especially because of the high cost of their health care. They are characterized as greedily taking services that they do not require or failing to vote for schools because they no longer have school-age children. In defense against these generalizations, we revert

back to the defensive position described earlier, advocating for older persons on the basis of what they did in the past, rather than respecting them because they are.

Gerontologists in today's society are, among other things, advocates on behalf of older persons. This role is understandable in light of the way older persons are perceived, essentially as weakened members of the society or as burdens who need advocacy from stronger and more significant members of the community.

Another tenet of Swadhyaya that is important to me in this context is related to the concept that viewing one individual as superior implies that another is inferior. This kind of hierarchical relationship creates many problems for older persons in an industrialized society if they are considered less valuable than persons who are productively employed. Work, or the ability to work, is not what should bond us together but rather our humanness, our uniqueness and the presence of a common God in all of us. I refer back to the report of a national conference on aging in 1965 and a citation by Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel that captures some of the same feelings for me:

Old age is a major challenge to the individual: it takes both wisdom and strength not to succumb to it. According to all standards we employ socially as well as privately, the aged person is condemned as inferior. In terms of manpower he is a liability, a burden, a drain on our resources. Conditioned to operate as a machine for making and spending money, with all other relationships dependent upon its efficiency, the moment the machine is out of order and beyond repair, one begins to feel like a ghost without a sense of reality. The aged may be described as a person who does not dream anymore, devoid of ambition, living in fear of losing his status. Regarding himself as a person who has outlived his usefulness, he feels as if he had to apologize for being alive.

We can apply the same observations to persons of any age who are regarded primarily for their productivity rather than for their persons.

College graduations

During the last week I have attended several college graduation exercises. In these and the many other graduation ceremonies I have attended over the years I have heard similar conflicting messages.

One part of the message says that you are great because of what you have attained, because you have abilities and have used them effectively. We recognize an attained elitist status by those who have succeeded academically. On the other hand, bestowing an elitist status on one group only relegates others who lack the academic achievement to a lesser status. Is it essential that we elevate one segment of the society over others by creating superiors and inferiors?

Once again I refer to what I consider to be one of the leading contributions of Swadhyaya ideas. That is to consider persons for the Godliness in them rather than for their accomplishments. This approach to evaluating individuals does not rule out measures of accomplishments, but restricts them to individual measure of accomplishment and does not use them to establish a hierarchical relationship.

What would we say to the graduating class in this revised approach? You are good and you have achieved and you have fulfilled the potential given to you. But part of the achievement has to be your understanding and accepting of responsibly using your new competence to help others also to achieve to their greatest capacity. This requires that part of your new responsibility is to use your status to elevate the competence of others so that they in turn assist others. Society then will benefit collectively from your new achievement, not you alone.

In my work I deal with this dialectic regularly. If one need is greater than another, must we establish priorities for response? This question must arise whenever we are asked to determine if one group is more important than another in our society or if one person is more significant than another.

Should limited funds be directed to children or older adults? Should we ration health care for older persons so that more will

be available for younger persons? Posing these questions illustrates the problem. We are asked to choose one over the other based on the relative value of a particular person at a specific time. Or we are asked to judge the relative value of a person based on ethnicity, gender or chronological age. In either of these illustrations we deny the significance of the person, and this to my mind is the principle issue to which Swadhyaya would object.

Closing

I have been exposed to a social movement that has arisen in response to a troubled society. While its message is universal, its direct application has been limited to the Indian subcontinent. Yet its message of the importance of each individual has existed over the centuries. The message of the Godliness of each of us inspires a sense of the worth of every individual, of the equality of all persons regardless of their attainment in society. The movement has been successful in transforming disruptive communities to productive social models of how society can be organized to operate on behalf of its residents. The need for the replication of these precepts is worldwide but I have specifically used as illustrations the way we have devalued older people in our society and the plight of the American Indian. Each of these groups would benefit from the introduction of the values of Swadhyaya into its community.

I close my presentation with another citation from Dr. Heschel at the same conference on aging in 1965:

> Old men need a vision, not only recreation.
> Old men need a dream, not only a memory.
> It takes three things to attain a sense of significant being:
> God
> A Soul
> A Moment
> The three are always here.
> Just to be is a blessing, just to live is holy.

It appears we could easily paraphrase this message to be consistent with Swadhyaya by merely extending it beyond old persons. All persons need a vision, all persons need a dream. For all persons as well as old men it takes the same three things to attain a sense of significant being: God, a Soul and a Moment. I find this consistent with the Swadhyaya movement.

Realizing the Vision of Swadhyaya Through Practical Experiments

Narendra Yamdagni

How to describe Swadhyaya?

The vision of Swadhyaya does not fit into any traditional framework. It is not easy to explain it in traditional terms. For example, if it is said that the basic element of this vision is the concept of an indwelling God which motivates people to offer their talent and time as a gratitude to God and transforms their devotion into a social force, then this statement may mean very different things for different persons. It will depend on what is one's concept of the indwelling God, what is one's understanding of the gratitude to God and what meaning one attaches to the word devotion. These terms will mean significantly different things to different persons depending on their cultural and religious background. Many will think of Swadhyaya as a religious cult, others may regard Swadhyaya as a spiritually-oriented group and some may consider Swadhyaya as a social reform organization. But Swadhyaya is none of them. So, how does one understand the vision of Swadhyaya? An understanding of this vision will require some familiarity with the sources from which Swadhyaya draws its main inspiration and their relationship to the thoughts prevailing in the world today.

The source of inspiration

Swadhyaya draws its inspiration from the wisdom treasured in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagawad Gita. These represent the evolution of human thought from the earliest period of human activity. They constitute a heritage for the world and are the greatest gifts from India to mankind. Indian sages have protected and preserved them over thousands of years. Traditionally, human consciousness is regarded to be the result of the interaction of the human mind with sensory perceptions, enriched and evolved by our reason and intellect. During the period of classical antiquity (about 500 B.C.) the Greeks laid the foundations of rational thought and the modern civilization in the West is the result. However, the older wisdom of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagawad Gita presented a significantly wider view. The essence of this wisdom is the realization that there is a domain beyond the human consciousness. A domain that cannot be described and understood by the concepts based on sense perceptions. It is a domain that is formed, enlarged and enriched by meditation and the Yoga. Indian concepts such as: human soul *(atma),* universal soul (Brahma or Paramatma), the indwelling concept of God or devotion as a moving force can only be understood in this framework. If an attempt is made to understand these and other similar concepts using logic and reason, it only leads to contradictions. Rather than intellect it is often intuition that provides a better description and understanding. Deep within human consciousness is this new domain that may be termed super-consciousness. This new domain is the seat of the indwelling God, which cannot be felt or apprehended by sense perceptions or understood by logic and reason.

The world today

The world today is strongly influenced by the values of science, rationalism and secular humanism. Science and technology have brought us closer in space and time. Rationalism has led us to confine ourselves to only that which can be understood by our sense perceptions. Secular humanism is gradually moving us away from

the influence of traditional religions. Democratic traditions and economic interdependence are growing. Modern civilization in the West is an inheritance from the Greek. They laid the foundation of natural science to test and prove all things in the light of reason. It has enabled the West to use nature in the service of mankind. In the present century these views and traditions have been widely accepted and at times blindly copied by the East. But the modern civilization has taken man away from man and has failed to create a universal human community. The ideal of community is a vague aspiration that is not shared by all. Those who accept this ideal are attempting to bring about the change through economic and political processes. Economic aid can address the acute social or economic problem of the day but often results in dependency. On the political level there is a great desire in the less-developed world and former Communist blocs, an eagerness or even an insistence on introducing a western-style democratic system, without considering its feasibility or appropriateness. At present the industrialized countries regard the developing countries as markets that have to conform to the market forces. This frequently leads to the breakdown of traditional systems and often results in corruption, exploitation and political chaos. But market forces do not feel or accept any responsibility for the resulting social problems and the human pain. For billions of persons in the world today poverty is crushing, the social problems very real and the human pain very acute. Where do they find the strength to bear the pain and face the problems? What do they do to find meaning in their lives and to restore their self-respect and human dignity? Is there any meaningful answer to these questions? For some persons, these may even not be the appropriate questions. For others, such problems may be the necessary evils that have to be endured as part of the process of development.

Swadhyaya and the world today

Nearly fifty years ago Swadhyaya made a modest beginning when nineteen young men were deeply inspired by Pandurang Shastri Athavale (popularly known as Dada, meaning elder brother), then

a young scholar and philosopher well versed in the traditions of the East and the West. With his keen power of observation he tried to understand the problems of modern man in relation to his own family and the whole of society. He saw the economic materialism as the main cause of social and economical problems. Material wealth and enjoyment of life have important places in human experience. But are they the only goals of human existence? He noted that the politicians were trying to solve human problems by economic and political means. They were expecting to change human thinking by enacting and enforcing laws.

Dada firmly believes that man cannot be transformed by enacting laws. Enacting laws and trying to enforce them is like putting a fence around people. Fences can confine people—but not change them. For Dada the transformation of man must begin with himself and others and this in many ways is the true meaning of the word Swadhyaya (literally self-study). According to Dada a first step in this direction is to establish relationships with others. A relationship with a stranger, a relationship based on love but with no expectations. Simply stated it means bringing man closer to man. In today's world this may appear to be a contradiction. Today who has the time to establish a relationship with a stranger? But this is a cornerstone of Swadhyaya.

Instead of using secular means to change human beings, Dada wants to change man by theistic (belief in the existence of God) thinking. For him religion is the only way to transform man, but that religion has to be grounded in reason. Ritualistic religion, which creates barriers between people, is not the answer. For Dada, the teachings of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagawad Gita are not for scholars alone; they must be incorporated in daily life.

Today a majority of the population of the world does not have either status or wealth. Many are leading a life of dependency. Dependency often leads to humiliation and results in the loss of self-respect. Self-respect is the spinal cord of human existence. A life filled with dependency and humiliation breaks down self-confidence. Without self-respect and self-confidence people throughout the world are constantly being exploited and manipulated by the

political, religious and business leaders. With his deep-rooted conviction, Dada has shown that the only way to build and maintain self-respect is not to accept anything for which one has not worked. Dada has never appealed for, asked or received financial assistance from the government or the rich. In Swadhyaya, be he a simple farmer, a fisherman, a professional or an intellectual, no person in the movement solicits or accepts any donation. Poverty must be removed but not at the cost of self-respect. It may take a much longer time but the route of self-help is the only sure way to maintain human dignity and build self-confidence.

The vision of Swadhyaya

Theistic approach for changing the man and the society requires a clear understanding about one's concept of God. There is a deep-rooted desire and a very widespread effort to personify God by giving him innumerable forms and attributes. At one end of the spectrum is the lively concept of God whose forms and attributes are described in intricate details. This is traditionally associated with idol worship. At the other end of the spectrum is the abstract concept of God that is formless and without any attributes. This concept is synonymous with what one calls Nature. In between these two extremes one can find a multitude of forms and attributes. In the concept of an indwelling God the form is not specified but the attributes are well described. It is a concept that is readily accepted by a large number of people with widely different backgrounds. It inspires people but does not mislead them. It makes God one's closest and constant companion. The concept has deep-seated roots in the Indian civilization. Symbols play an important part in our lives but they also partly color our vision. When most Indians think of an indwelling God their ideas are strongly influenced by the rich mythology and the related personification of God. This mythology tends to describe the framework in which the attributes of the indwelling God are specified. To an observant and understanding mind such a framework presents no difficulty but to an axiomatic and rigid mind there are obvious problems.

When the concept of an indwelling God becomes deep-seated in one's mind it is followed by an innate and intense desire to offer one's time and talent as a gratitude to God. As long as this does not happen one's actions are devoid of devotion. They are an act of pity, an act of charity, an act of cooperation or an act of social concern. But they do not represent the vision of Swadhyaya. The vision of Swadhyaya becomes a reality when one's actions are motivated and guided by a sense of devotion. It is only then that an individual is ready to relate with fellow beings out of love and without any expectations. Expression of one's gratitude to God and the sense of devotion is central to the vision of Swadhyaya. Actions out of social concern may appear to be similar but there are differences which, although subtle and small, are important. As long as one is unable or unwilling to notice these differences, the vision of Swadhyaya will appear to be unrealistic and impractical and transforming devotion into a social force will remain an empty slogan.

Family has always been the natural unit of society, in which blood relationship is the bond that brings people together. Relationships within the family are based on love and respect for each other. In Swadhyaya the concept of the traditional family is extended to the divine family. Blood relationship is extended to a relationship through the Blood Maker. This is a natural extension of the concept of an indwelling God. Swadhyaya Parivar (family) is a very large family. It has minimal formal organization, no formal membership and no membership fee.

Practical experiments

In October 1994, I got the opportunity to see many of the experiments and had in-depth discussions with the participants of these experiments. Their way of thinking and reasoning filled me with amazement verging on disbelief. Yogeshwar krushi (farming in the name of God) is one such experiment. It is practiced in several thousand villages. A small piece of land (five to ten acres) is cultivated as a divine farm. All things that are required for cultivating the land, such as seeds, manure, agricultural equipment, pesticides,

etc. are given by the villagers as their share of the offering to God. Since the number of villagers working on this land is large each group of farmers gets its turn for a few days at a time, only once or twice a year. For the rest of the time they are busy with their own farming. What happens to their own farming when they are working on the Yogeshwar land? The rest of the villagers are more than eager to help and work on their lands, thus establishing strong bonds of brotherhood among the villagers.

The produce from Yogeshwar krushi creates impersonal wealth. No one claims a share, because everything was offered in devotion. A part of this impersonal wealth is discreetly offered, as a gift of God, to those who need. Another part is used for the common requirements of the village and the rest is credited to the Madhavi Raksha Sankalp, a mode of banking without interest. Yogeshwar krushi may appear to be similar to collective farming or cooperative farming or Kibbutz or communes, but it is none of them. It is a nonconventional way of worship. In the midst of the traditional society that encourages incentive-oriented actions and ego-boosting way of thinking, it is very refreshing to see Yogeshwar krushi as a novel experiment. Like a scientist, Dada has repeated the experiment over and over again and has demonstrated its validity and success as a socioeconomic experiment. It is no longer an experiment, but a way of life.

Not satisfied with the success of Yogeshwar krushi at the village level, Dada has extended the concept to a larger farm at the level of a group of about twenty villages, called Shree darshanam. Four or five persons from a village stay and work at the farm for three days and overlap with the next group and this goes on in rotation over all the villages. This has broken down barriers between villages and has linked them in larger groups. Both the experiments are really bringing man closer to man.

Another novel experiment aims at bringing man closer to Nature. Emphasizing that a growing tree is a manifestation of the omnipresence of God, Dada has created Vrkshamandir (temple of trees). A piece of land is acquired by Swadhyaya where people from at least ten villages and an adjoining town or city come together

in small groups to look after the fruit-bearing trees, not so much to create an orchard but more out of an act of devotion, a devotion expressed through the medium of spade and sickle. The survival rate of the trees is nearly one hundred percent. It is not an experiment in planting trees but on human beings, to make them realize their relationship to God. I spent two days at one of these tree temples. It was a memorable experience not so much due to the lush green environment of fruit-laden trees but due to intimate exchange of views with the persons working there. Sitting under the shade of mango trees we talked about simple and at times not-so-simple questions from agriculture to philosophy. For me it was an important lesson in the love of nature and devotion.

Matsyagandha is an experiment that has changed the lives of people in many fishing communities in India. The fishermen had, for many years, suffered from alcoholism and were involved in all kinds of smuggling and petty crime. Their family lives were sad tales of physical violence, economic misery and impoverished homes. Some were forced by economic circumstances to leave their native villages and become sailors in the merchant marine. When they came in contact with Swadhyaya they started to offer their skills (fishing and navigation). Putting aside their earning for one day in a fortnight and in addition offering their labor, they could build a motorized fishing boat in about six to eight months. By now more than forty such boats have been built and nearly eleven thousand fishermen take their turn to work on these boats in groups that average six to ten persons. The impersonal wealth being created by this experiment makes impressive figures. But more important are the happy and smiling faces of the wives and children of the million-member fishing community.

In places where Swadhyaya work has taken root, the villagers with their voluntary efforts have built simple hut temples, called Loknath Amritalayams. These are places where every evening villagers gather without any distinction of status or religion. A Hindu may read from the Bhagawad Gita, a Muslim from the Koran or a Christian from the Bible. The serenity of the atmosphere and the harmony among the people has to be seen to be believed.

Anonymously but regularly they give a part of their earnings to be used for those who are in need.

A long-standing desire of Swadhyaya doctors to participate in some practical experiment was realized when *Patanjali Chikitsalaya* (medical centers without any staff) were started. The doctors and surgeons from towns and cities go to these medical centers in small groups and stay there for a week. These professionals are in the villages not only to offer advice or treat the sick, but what is more important, to establish the bonds of affection. To a traditional observer, the scene in which surgeons and doctors are flying kites with the villagers and sharing simple meals with them may appear to be a waste of time and talent. But it is a truly representative scene of Swadhyaya, very much in harmony with the vision of Swadhyaya. Without a relationship, the treatment offered is an act of charity and not an experiment in Swadhyaya, where devotion is the driving force. It also illustrates the question why the vision of Swadhyaya cannot fit into any traditional framework.

How far the vision has been realized?

The list of experiments is long. Each experiment is aimed at bringing about a desirable socioeconomic change by appealing to the divinity inherent in every human being. The statement "Divinity is a social force" is not an empty slogan. It enables us to demand the best in us and the reason that it is succeeding in India is that the true power of religion still survives in the society. It may be dormant but it is there. The vision of Swadhyaya has been embraced in nearly one hundred thousand villages and has reached about twenty million people in India. Outside India the numbers are small but growing rapidly. Besides the villagers, it has also touched the hearts and minds of professionals and the intelligentsia in India and throughout the world.

Swadhyaya does not want to artificially inflate its total membership; it has worked hard to prevent this. During the past year a number of programs have been organized by Swadhyaya. Four of them were attended by more than one million persons each. Were

these the crowds of curious persons or were they the gatherings of dedicated and disciplined persons? The very fact that no police presence was necessary to conduct the programs tells a lot about the nature of the persons. This is significant, impressive and thought provoking.

The number of experiments will grow and each experiment will be implemented at tens, hundreds or thousands of different places. How far will the message of Swadhyaya reach? I believe it will spread throughout India as well as other parts of the world. The present century has seen the outstanding success of science and technology. But this material success has impaired human relations and has polarized societies into haves and have-nots. There is an ever-increasing need to bring man closer to man, bring man closer to nature and bring man closer to God. This is exactly what Swadhyaya has been doing in the past decades. One hopes that the next century will see an outstanding improvement in human relations, as the message of Swadhyaya brings hope, self-respect and self-confidence to an ever-increasing number of people.

The essence of that message was conveyed by Dada some time ago. While visiting a place of pilgrimage, Dada was being coaxed by the local priest to offer money at different places. This behavior very much annoyed the persons accompanying Dada. At the end of the visit they could not resist commenting on the harassing behavior of the priest. Dada smiled and replied: "It is not his fault. We have to bring the message of Swadhyaya to him and hopefully it will change his thinking." In brief, that is the message of Swadhyaya. Swadhyaya should not judge others but build relationships based on love and brotherhood. Other things will follow automatically.

Swadhyaya: Toward a New World Order[1]

Pramila Jayapal

The 1996 Human Development Report, compiled by the United Nations Development Programme, offers more evidence for a failed approach to development: the worldwide gap between rich and poor, it tells us, has widened faster than ever before. Today, the richest 20 percent of the world's population earn 85 percent of the world's income. The net worth of the world's 358 billionaires (in dollar terms) is equivalent to the combined assets of 2.3 billion of the world's poorest people, who account for a stunning 45 percent of the world's total population. In fact, evidence shows that structural adjustment programs promoted by the "developed" countries have actually contributed to a regression of per capita incomes in most "developing" countries to their levels of the 1960s and 1970s.[2]

The focus on "economic development" subordinates the wealth of culture, tradition and spirituality that exists in a country like India. "Inner" development is sidelined, while "outer" or material development becomes the ultimate apex toward which to ascend. Today, there is a loss of self-respect, a loss of any belief in interconnectedness to others, a loss of reverence for that which cannot be controlled by man. These factors, previously considered imma-

terial to the prosperity or progress of a society, are now proving to be integral to a more holistic, humanistic development.

Since coming to India, my thinking on development has undergone a transformation. I have moved from believing that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) offer the "solution" to the realization that the kinds of solution being offered by most development efforts (including those undertaken by NGOs) are treating only symptoms. What we need is nothing short of a new social paradigm, a new world order that emphasizes spiritual over material development, community over individual relationship, collaboration over competition. No institution has been able to offer an acceptable large-scale alternative form of development to the current one. Many have tried and some have even been successful on a micro level; but more often than not the inextricable links between various aspects of a society's development, as well as the sheer dominance of the existing order, overwhelm most groups. In the end, the groups end up cutting off dead branches or trying to bring some back to life, rather than observing and attacking the agents of decay and rot.

This has become the case with many NGOs, originally the renegades that pushed for a change in government "standard operating procedures." Today, these groups often find themselves struggling to deal with issues of self-preservation, impure motives of staff and leaders, and the dilemma of meeting local and specific needs of a community versus working toward "replicability" and "sustainability." Moreover, they are too often co-opted into taking government money or taking on government responsibilities. In the process, they become part of the system they were originally trying to change.

I am increasingly convinced that our entire approach to development is misguided. The close link between poverty or inequality and the host of other social problems (like literacy, caste, gender empowerment, etc.) indicate that these problems are merely symptoms of a society that creates and encourages poverty and inequality. As John Ruskin said a century ago, the rich are only rich by virtue of the poor. Our current system encourages accumulation of wealth

by a small percentage of the world's population, while a large majority continues on a desperate struggle to eat one decent meal every day. Efforts that focus on "fixing" problems, and on "helping the poor" reflect an implied social hierarchy of poor and rich, helpers and those who need to be helped, and a largely materialistic definition of poverty. Our new order needs to work toward equal allocation and saving of essential resources, an internalization of the fundamental "same-ness" of human beings, recognition of spiritual development over material, and a sense of responsibility for the consequences of one's life and actions as they impact another's.

During a short visit to the United States in April, 1996, I shared some of these thoughts about the loss of spirituality in the modern world with ICWA (Institute of Current World Affairs) Executive Director, Peter Martin. I felt particularly distressed seeing this trend sweep India, I told him, because India has such a wealth of spiritual experience and history. "Well, what is the answer?" he asked me. "How do you bring this sense of spirituality back?" I had no answers. I had seen so many NGO projects, so many efforts to try to restore some of what was being buried in consumerism and capitalism, but none seemed to be able to break the snowballing forces of the modern world.

And then, we encountered Swadhyaya. "A silent but singing revolution," as one author has termed it, Swadhyaya uses spirituality as a basis for restoring individual dignity and establishing relationship between human beings. Swadhyaya has taken hold in over one hundred thousand villages across India; and its success springs largely from a completely new way of looking at the world and its "problems."

My husband and I first heard of Swadhyaya at a conference called "Re-Thinking the Current Economic Order: Gandhi and Beyond". The conference was about the focus on the current dominant economic paradigm: is it appropriate? If not, what should there be in its place? How is such a change to be brought about? The articulate and passionate voices of long-time socialists, the convictions of Gandhians for a world imagined by the Mahatma but never realized, and the urgency of those working in

the field who feel frustrated with just providing "Band-Aid" solutions—all crescendoed into one single realization: that a basic sense of reverence for something other than ourselves needed to be restored.

It was in this context that D.L. Sheth, a scholar from the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, talked about Swadhyaya. It was our first light; and as we learned more, its rays shone strongly through an otherwise gloomy world prognosis. Luck, destiny, or hard work—we do not know (one rarely does in India)—but soon after, we were invited by Rajiv Vora of the Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF) to participate in a five-day tour of Swadhyaya communities and projects across Gujarat State. The tour would culminate in a meeting with the revered 76-year-old founder of Swadhyaya, Pandurang Shastri Athavale or Dada (meaning, elder brother) as he is affectionately called by all swadhyayees.

"Dadaji is the first person since Indian independence that I would put in the same category as Mahatma Gandhi," said Rajiv Vora to us prior to the tour. For those of us too young or skeptical to have been in the presence of true visionaries, it is our ignorance that makes us doubt such a possibility. And it is our arrogance that ultimately proves us wrong—thankfully. Shastri was recently granted the prestigious Magasaysay award for his vision and service, but it seems irrelevant given the magnitude of his work. Having met him and seen the work of Swadhyaya, my husband and I recognize that we had the unique fortune to be in the presence of a true visionary, to experience the building up of a movement that is slowly accumulating the power to shake the country and create a new order that I once had relegated to a dream.

Swadhyaya, meaning knowledge or discovery of the self, is about individual transformation through spiritual awareness. The goal of Swadhyaya—although it is not "goal-oriented" in any conventional sense—is to restore respect for a greater power and the creation of that greater power, especially respect for one's self. In this process of individual transformation, societal transformation (often the primary but elusive goal of many social organizations and governments) occurs as a by-product.

Swadhyaya is neither a membership organization nor a political movement (although for the sake of convenience, I sometimes refer to it as a movement here). It is a "stream" of thought and consciousness that now has millions of followers in one hundred thousand Indian villages, and in several countries around the world. Just this year, several hundred thousand swadhyayees collected on the sacred ground of Kurukshetra, the battlefield of *The Mahabharata* where Arjuna learned the meaning of dharma. This was a particularly meaningful location, as it is said to be the site where the Bhagawad Gita[3]—the textual basis for much of Swadhyaya's teachings—took place.

Swadhyaya does not fit into our up-to-date concepts or methods of societal development because it has none of the features by which we have come to define such development: it is not interested in quick results or publicity (although it has been operating since the late 1950s with incredible "results," it has remained quite unknown to date); it does not report to any donor, religious body or controlling force; it has no political ideology or dogma; it is not concerned about "sustainability and self-sufficiency," issues which are actually moot in its particular context; and most importantly, it is not out to solve a problem or to do social work.

As prescribed in the Gita, Swadhyaya advocates a path to self-realization that revolves around bhakti or devotion to God. It is predicated on belief in a world community where individuals are connected to other individuals as well as to nature by virtue of their common creator. Devotion to God is demonstrated in two key ways: first, through offering *puja* (prayer) and other devotional singing or ceremonies. This kind of puja helps to purify the mind by concentrating on the noblest, most sublime and divine object—from which it can absorb those pure qualities. The second way to express devotion to God is to donate one's "efficiency"—skills and talents—toward doing God's work. Together, these result in both individual and societal transformation.

Dada believes that a society can be healthy only if individuals in the society have self-respect. Self-respect develops in swadhyayees when they understand that God is not in some temple or church, but rather within them. If God actually resides within me, goes the

logic, then I am worthy of self-respect. And if God resides within me, then you also have God residing within you—which makes you worthy of respect. By virtue of our creation, we are related as brothers in the divine fatherhood of God. The relatedness and interconnectedness brings "man closer to man," a popular Swa-dhyaya slogan, and creates a whole new context for individual existence.[4]

Activities like pujas help an individual to preserve the feeling of the nearness of God. This is essential for reaching the ultimate and highest stage of spiritual development outlined in the Upanishads not only is God within each individual, but there is actually no difference between God and individual.[5] Swadhyaya brings Upanishadic concepts of spiritual development first into the intellectual framework of an individual (some of whom, because of rigid caste systems or illiteracy, have never had access to these texts). Then, it seeks to internalize the concepts through the three paths mentioned in Indian scripture: devotion to God (bhakti), selfless action (karma), and self-knowledge (jnana). During the process of internalization, individual transformation begins to occur in action and thought.

Although the ethos of Swadhyaya is Hindu, it is not only for Hindus or Indians. The Gita, says Dada, is a human scripture that incorporates and applies to all religions. Slowly, Swadhyaya is gaining acceptance among various groups of Christians and Muslims, both within and outside India. "Religion is a spiritual order to go to God—there may be different kinds of orders, therefore different religions," says Dada. Bhakti, or devotion to God, is present in all of them, and in this sense, universal to all.

The kind of devotion that Dada advocates is far from the "blind faith" so common today in India and around the world. One of Dada's initial followers, Hemraj Ashar, puts it this way: "Dada speaks logically, but never says you must accept it. He never quotes any authority, never says: 'This is in the Gita, therefore you must accept it.' He lashes out at blind faith and is the first to criticize what is commonly called devotion or religion. Even while sitting in the temple, he would watch people taking and giving money for religion's sake and say, 'This is a bazaar, not a temple.'"

Despite Dada's plea for reason over blind faith, the constant references to God and devotion initially sent shivers down my spine. I suppose I have embedded in me many aspects of Western culture, a culture that often promotes the view that we are entirely responsible for our own lives, and a rejection of the idea of an external power to whom "control" must be surrendered at times—if not all the time. As I began to better understand the essence of Swadhyaya and listened to swadhyayees talk about what it meant to have devotion to God, I understood that I could substitute the notion of a universal force—which I do have a belief in—for the term "God." The concepts hold strong in either case.

The genesis

Pandurang Shastri Athavale (Dada) is a Sanskrit scholar and philosopher. When Dada was young, his grandfather (then a school principal) decided to put his grandson through tapovan (hermitage), a kind of learning process to provide him with a thorough grasp of Indian shastras, logic and philosophy. In his early twenties, Dada emerged from this course, only to voluntarily immerse himself for another twelve years in the study of Western philosophy, a task he felt necessary in order to understand and communicate with the West, and the Western-educated Indians.

In 1954, at the age of thirty-four, Dada attended the Second World Religious Congress in Japan. The paper he presented rejected the material track the world seemed to be moving on, and instead advocated the spiritual way described in the Bhagawad Gita. This path stresses the importance of bhakti, of performing one's duty to the best of one's capability but without any attachment to the fruits of the labor, and the idea that the individual is not "the doer." God is the "doer," and the individual is merely the pathway for actions to be carried out.

The audience was impressed with his words and the seeming "answers" to modern problems that were recorded in the Gita. They asked Dada where in India they could go to see these principles being lived out. This was perhaps the defining movement in

Dada's life; a moment when some reports state that he confronted the reality that in their own birthplace, the principles of the Gita and the Upanishads were being lost to the monoculture of modernism. As a result of the 1954 Congress, Dada received several offers of academic appointments in the West, but he knew his mission and returned to India to continue teaching and giving discourses on the Hindu texts.

His followers over the next five to six years were a small but dedicated group. They had the fortune to have heard the voice of a man who would change the futures of millions of people. Although swadhyayees today consist of a cross-section of individuals from Indian society, in the early days a critical group of followers consisted of young, highly educated individuals, mostly from middle-class backgrounds, who hailed from Bombay where Dada was based.

Hemraj Ashar, now a very well-known attorney in Bombay, is a small, spry man who exudes intelligence. In his clear, soft and humorous voice, he told us about the genesis of Swadhyaya from Dada's mind into reality. "For six years, in the 1950s, we used to listen to Dada as he talked about the Gita and the Upanishads. His central message was always that we are here to do God's work, and this is what we should be doing. I used to listen to him and think, 'Well, that is fine, but what can we do of God's work? He makes the sun rise and set—how can I help him with that? He must do his own work. What can I do to help?' Dada would talk about the brotherhood of man and how it was being lost. He told us that we needed to go to the villages and reconnect with our brothers and sisters there. We should find out how they lived, these people related to us by virtue of a common Creator. At first, we didn't want to go. What would we say to them? What would they say to us? Dadaji simply replied: 'Tell them you are their brothers and you want to get to know them.'"

In 1957, a group of seventeen people went on what was to be the first of thousands of devotional visits—bhaktipheris—to villages. Their mission was to meet their brothers and sisters in this divine fatherhood of God, and to establish a continued relationship

of trust. The idea was that villagers should not mistake the bhaktipheris as selfish or with motive. Swadhyayees were instructed not to take any thing from villagers. They had to carry all their supplies (food, stove, blankets and lamps) with them. All expenses were born by the swadhyayees. Dada also requested them to take transport only up to a central village, and then from that point to walk into the villages carrying their own supplies and luggage. Driving into the mud roads of a small village in a car or motorcycle could connote a hierarchy based on wealth, when the message of Swadhyaya is about the essential "same-ness" of all mankind. Perhaps Dada also wanted the city people to go back to the simplicity of earlier years when walking, talking and seeing the countryside were part of building a relationship with fellow travellers, with nature, with God.

The bhaktipheris play two central roles in Swadhyaya. First, it is the driving force behind the growth of Swadhyaya today. Bhaktipheris are now carried out by thousands of people across India and, to a lesser extent, abroad in the Americas, Europe, parts of Africa and the Gulf states. The essential rules still hold—the message has not changed and individuals bear all their own expenses for the bhaktipheris. Swadhyayees continue to visit the same people over a long period of time—Swadhyaya is not about visiting one family one week and another the next week. The basis of the visits is to build a relationship of trust, and to bring people to the realization that each individual, each living thing is divine. There is no underlying motive of conversion to a particular cult or religion, no intent even to "change" someone—just the desire to meet and know. It is precisely because of this lack of ulterior motive that Swadhyaya has been so successful. In many villages, we were told that 80 to 90 percent of the villagers were swadhyayees. To be a swadhyayee does not entail "joining" in any way—no membership fee, no induction. One becomes a swadhyayee when one feels convinced of the essential principles of Swadhyaya philosophy and begins being active in its work. When this is so, swadhyayees naturally and through self-inspiration take part in devotional activities and community activities through

which they can do God's work. In this way, the Swadhyaya community forms.

The second role of bhaktipheri is that it is one of the primary ways in which individuals can internalize the messages of universal brotherhood and connectedness, and the principles of an inner God. By continually talking about the messages and the basic concepts of Swadhyaya, swadhyayees say that they gradually begin to understand, believe and follow. Most swadhyayees devote half of their yearly vacations to going on bhaktipheris, and they want you to know that they are not doing social work; that is their way of showing devotion to God and everything He has created.

Hemraj Ashar laughs when he thinks back on the first visits: the complete city misfits going to the villages, the doubts that they had in their minds, the discomfort of being the first to carry a message of divine brotherhood and devotion that was long forgotten. But the seventeen people who went were the beginning of Swadhyaya in India.

Swadhyaya in action: individual transformation

It is not easy to understand Swadhyaya—the concepts are simple, but the changes that occur as a result are unimaginable in our present context. We are used to seeing small changes, changes that occur as part of a project designed to create those changes. I, like most people on our five-day tour of Swadhyaya communities and projects, went through a process of questioning, disbelieving and trying to find fault with, before finally accepting that this was not "too good to be true." Appropriately, it is the exact process of logical reasoning that Dada advocates: believe only after you yourself have questioned and understood.

"There is no social problem that Swadhyaya does not address," said one swadhyayee emphatically to our group at the beginning of the tour. Most of us scoffed—if not aloud, then within. It is difficult to believe such a statement—particularly for a group of people who have an umbilical cord to cynicism and doubt. And yet, as our journey progressed, everyone—without exception—recognized

that what we were seeing was profoundly different from any other movement, any other "development effort."

A diverse group of individuals made the tour, all sharing a common concern for the ailments of today's world, and particularly for the direction India was taking—a direction that seemed certain to put it on a path that neglected spiritual development of the individual. There was the Maulana, a revered Muslim leader known for his work of religious tolerance, and his intense love for the country. At seventy, the Maulana made a striking figure with his long white beard, beautifully lined face and white robe. He took notes copiously, and would ask people to write in his small book their prognosis of India's future. There was a Rimpoche (high Buddhist monk and Speaker of Tibet's Parliament-in-exile) who had worked closely with the Dalai Lama for Tibet's freedom. There were people from extremes of the political continuum—from the fundamentalist Hindu RSS party to India's Socialist party. There were professors from well-known universities, journalists, social scientists, environmental activists and social reformers.

For four days our group of twenty travelled through the state of Gujarat, listening to testimonies of individual transformation and community rejuvenation; of miracles and fulfilled dreams; of laughter and love; of social justice that had occurred—incredibly—as a by-product of this movement of change.

Our first stop was the *chawls* (the poorest slum areas, made up largely of low caste people) of Ahmedabad. The road to the first chawl we visited became bumpier as the car wound its way from the city outskirts to its center. We stopped at a muddy dirt road, the reddish-orange mud interrupted by puddles of cloudy water with sewage floating on top. The lanes were narrow, populated with buffaloes, people and children. A sudden spurt of heavy monsoon rain beat down on the tin roofs of the shacks that lined the roads.

We made our way into a concrete room whose walls were peppered with small shrines with pictures and statues of deities. These were strung with fresh garlands of flowers and marked with wet red paste, indicating a recent puja. The room was filled with men, women and children who lived in the area, mostly of the sweeper

caste and widely considered "untouchables." They greeted us with roses, streaked our foreheads with the same red paste to bless us in welcome. Murmurs of "Jai Yogeshwar,"[6] the Swadhyaya greeting, echoed around us. A well-dressed man stood up and began speaking. The manager of the local State Bank of India, he lived only one kilometer away, and yet for thirty years had never bothered to come to this area. "I used to think that this caste was too low for me. Dada's words changed me. I began to think if I won't go there, then who will?"

A stream of shared experiences followed: there was Pushpa Behn,[7] a strong, stout woman who used to get furious with the disparity between the way her harijan caste was insulted and the way rich people were honored. "Because of my caste, I was not even allowed to carry the Gita! Now, not only have I learnt the Gita, I feel I have a head full of its thoughts." There was Narayan Bhai, a reformed alcoholic who said he gave up drink with the realization that God was within him. "If we leave our shoes outside the temple before going to see God, shouldn't we keep our bodies pure if God is within us?" The accounts followed one after another, a stream of testimonies to personal change formerly unthinkable, a periscope into the troubled lives of before that had now opened to hope.

The next chawl of the *bhavlakshis* (Dada's term for India's ex-untouchables) was made up of a group of eighteen families who belong to the vaghri community. Vaghris are untouchables who are said to have originally come from Rajasthan and are branded as lazy "good-for-nothings." (There are about one hundred thousand vaghri people spread across the chawls of Ahmedabad.) But now, according to Raju Bhai, things are changing. He told us, choked with emotion, the story of his personal transformation. "I used to be a gambler, even running a gambling den in my own house. I was powerful in my community, people listened to me because they were scared of me. I drank daily, and rarely went to work. I respected no one. I would beat my mother, and then take her gold chains to sell to buy alcohol. I beat my wife and children. I didn't believe in God—what kind of God could have me live a life like

this?" Tears were rolling down Raju's cheeks as he spoke. "I have changed with Swadhyaya. I do not gamble or drink. I love and respect my family. I understand that God is within everyone, including me. If I ill-treat others or myself, I am ill-treating God."

Even the attitudes toward the vaghris among the police, Raju said, are changing now. Before, the vaghris had such a bad reputation that if a crime was committed and there were five different suspects of whom one was a vaghri, the vaghri would invariably be charged. Now, if it is known that a vaghri is also a swadhyayee, the police actually release him.

We left the chawl to a line of singing people holding small wick lamps in their hands. As showers of red rose petals landed on my head and flitted down past my nose, I smelt their wonderful sweet fragrance. It was raining, but no one seemed to notice.

Dada says that Swadhyaya should reach "unto the last"—how much further can one go into social oppression than the untouchables? Since 1984, Swadhyaya has touched over one-fourth of all the chawls in Ahmedabad. At a recent meeting of swadhyayees in Ahmedabad, four hundred thousand untouchables were present. Dada's display of love for these individuals stimulated thought in others. According to one of the chawl residents, "He welcomed us, held us. It made us cry to be loved in a way that we had never experienced before. Because of him, people who used to throw us out, throw stones at us, also began to see that we were their brothers, divine representatives of God." Now there is a new sense of pride within these communities, and a gradual breakdown of caste prejudices among the higher caste groups of swadhyayees.

How do these kinds of dramatic changes actually come about? This question was asked in numerous ways at different times by all of us seeking to comprehend how such total transformation could succeed. Consistently, swadhyayees told us that the entire process of change began when they finally accepted that the motive for people coming to visit them on bhaktipheris was entirely selfless. These visits, which showed that people who did not even know them and who asked for nothing except friendship, seemed to rebuild a basic trust in humanity and in self. "At

first, when people started coming, we thought they were coming either for votes[8] or money or some other motive. Nobody ever comes without a selfish reason," said Harshan Behn in Kajali village. "Why would they just want to get to know us? But then, when they kept coming back time and time again for years, taking nothing from us but just wanting to get to know us, we began to believe them."

Many also talked about the important role that devotional activities—like the Trikal Sandhaya prayers, when thanks are offered to God at morning, noon and night for waking, existing and sleep—play in bringing about the internal changes. These activities are a constant reminder of the nearness of God, and the innate good nature of man. Related activities like group prayers and meetings where people can get together and speak are part of building a new sense of interconnectedness to others. Within these activities, traditional roles are constantly being broken down. For example, at the small temples that have been constructed in many Swadhyaya villages (open to all religions), the role of pujari (priest) is rotated among the villagers. In traditional Hindu communities, pujaris are drawn only from high-caste male Brahmins. In Swadhyaya villages, anyone who is doing God's work—i.e., thinking and acting in accordance with ideas of respect for God, self and others—can and does act as a pujari. There is no exclusiveness. In the context of the deep-rooted ideas of caste and gender in Hindu society, this is a significant achievement in itself and speaks to the kinds of barriers that Swadhyaya is breaking through.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, bhaktipheris are also essential for internalizing the concepts of an inner God and relatedness to other living beings. "As we talk about Swadhyaya, we bring understanding to ourselves and to others," said one swadhyayee. "There is no specific time or date when change takes place. A process starts which moves inward and then spreads. It is a continuous process and one that takes time [something that swadhyayees always emphasize]. We follow Dada's words that we must listen, practice and think. Swadhyaya affects our thoughts, makes us begin questioning things we have never questioned before."

In the end, though, the process of change is different for each individual—and often, inexplicable to the extent that observers would like to quantify and document.

Experiments in community transformation

Numerous experiments undertaken within Swadhyaya have reduced poverty and increased income of communities, or provided basic needs like water and irrigation to rural areas. Perhaps most important is that a new kind of community has been formed, a community where work is done for God and where individuals become closer to each other.

In the fishing villages along the coast of Gujarat, one fisherman's lucky day may be another's day of shortage. Mother Water is not always kind, and those fishermen who do not have their own boats usually work as wage earners on another's boat. On a good day, they earn enough to feed themselves. Life is hard. Inequality of income is often high, and alcohol is a warm retreat from the harsh realities.

But not in this village in Veraval district and many others like it. Kalpesh Bhai's face lights up when he speaks of their Matsyagandha experiment. Kalpesh Bhai is one of hundreds who has contributed one day a fortnight of labor, as well as tools and building materials, to build a fishing craft for the village. Donating their labor—their "efficiency"—is an expression of their devotion to God. Every day, five different fishermen contribute their time to go fishing on the community boat. The fish they catch is sold in the market, and the proceeds are distributed to those in need. The distribution is considered as "prasad"—offerings from God. As such, those who donate their efficiency do not develop a sense of superiority from "helping," and neither do recipients develop a sense of inferiority from being "helped." The wealth being distributed belongs to God, and in this sense, is impersonal.

The change Swadhyaya has brought about in the Saurashtra (western part of Gujarat province) is one of the most compelling. Recently, Saurashtra has suffered constantly from droughts; the land was parched and water a precious commodity. A bucket of

water, we were told, could cost ten rupees during the dry season. Hundreds of wells across Saurashtra, even deep wells, were dry. The water table seemed as far away as the other side of the earth. Several years ago, the Government joined the despairing ones, and termed Saurashtra a wasteland. Saurashtrians, fearing for their future, began to move out of the area, believing that abandoning their homes was the only course.

Enter Swadhyaya and the Nirmal Neers. "We have enough water," said Dada. "We just are not collecting and utilizing it properly." The theory was that even with droughts, there was still enough rainfall to fill up ponds (Nirmal Neers in Swadhyaya vocabulary), that could then be used to recharge wells and provide sufficient water for year-round use. The villagers promised Dada that they would build twenty Nirmal Neers in Saurashtra within a year. As with other Swadhyaya experiments, the ponds were built completely within time, using locally available materials and voluntary labor. Within a year, swadhyayees had built not only the twenty ponds they had promised Dada, but ten times that number! Over time, these Nirmal Neers proved so successful that they not only recharged the wells, but collected sufficient water that the water table even began to rise. Seeing Swadhyaya's work, villages across Saurashtra began to do similar work. Today, one research organization has found that almost 80 percent of all such reservoirs that exist in Saurashtra have been part of or inspired by Swadhyaya. Saurashtra is no longer a wasteland. Out of barren, rocky lands, swadhyayees have created lush green fields, grown crops where others had said it was impossible, and turned wasteland into productive land.

All Swadhyaya experiments aim at bringing "man closer to man." One particularly good example of an experiment that has changed the notion of community and individual relationship is the Shree darshanam, inspired by a visit Dada made to Israel, where he saw the kibbutz experiment. Shree darshanams are an experiment in community farming. Here a piece of land is acquired by the Swadhyaya trust for tending by a group of nearly twenty proximately located villages. (Work on Shree darshanam is started only in such areas where 90 percent of the population of the

participating contiguous villages consists of swadhyayees and they request to undertake the experiment.) A different person (pujari) from each of these twenty villages is assigned to work on the land on specific days of the month, so that on any given day there are a minimum of twenty people from the villages to talk about issues, problems and new ideas for farming. Ideas like non-chemical fertilizers, worming composts and other natural techniques to increase yields are introduced.

The pujaris spend eight hours working in the fields, and the evening hours talking, discussing ideas, learning and studying from other pujaris. Businessmen or white-collar professionals from neighboring urban areas who do not know about farming come as pujaris also. They learn about the earth and agriculture from those who can teach them during the day, and then to contribute their own efficiency during the evening hours of discussion and talks. When the crops are harvested, they are sold to swadhyayees at market prices. The demand is great, because they are "prasad"—offerings (of labor) to God that have been blessed and have come back in the form of crops. Any remaining produce is sold in the regular bazaar. Profit goes back to the central Swadhyaya trust, which is used to fund similar acquisition of land for such experiments, and other Swadhyaya activities.

Although inspired by the kibbutz, there are essential differences. Here, on days when individuals are not donating their efficiency to the Shree darshanam, they are working on their own individual farms. Nor are they expecting any "returns" from their work on the collective farm. In fact, reaping a good harvest is not the primary purpose of this Shree darshanam experiment—although this is often a by-product of performing work with love and absorption. Rather, the purpose is to expand the notion of community, and allow individuals to give of themselves selflessly with no thought to their reward or gain. Men, women and children are taught to think of more than themselves, their own families or even their own villages. They learn to respect the Creator and His creation—creation like Mother Earth. The result is that individual, community and Earth all blossom.

In Swadhyaya, the philosophy is that work should not be left to God, but the results of that work should. "Dada provided us the opportunity to be detached from our house and our work, and instead, do selfless service," said one swadhyayee. "In this way, we improve ourselves spiritually. We also have an opportunity to give back to Mother Earth what we take from her," said one white-bearded man, tenderly gesturing to the trees around him. Said another, "Our Shree darshanam is proving that the statement that 'man does not work without [monetary] incentive' is false. From twenty villages, we have made one community. Any sadness or need that exists in any of these twenty villages is like it exists in our own village. This is the community that has formed. This is above the sense of 'my' village. It is one level higher—about God's family."

The experiments are too many to give details of here: there is the construction of soak pits that have reduced the amount of exposed human excrement and stagnating water, and consequently the incidence of diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis. There are new roads, new houses, productive fields—all built in the same spirit of serving God. And perhaps the apex of all experiments is the Vidyapeeth—a school for children that teaches them about agricultural practices as well as provides them with a spiritual basis of thought that could help combat the dominant economic model outside. This is, from the very beginning, the creation of a new type of person.

The results: social work versus bhakti as a social force

Casual observers might look at the results of Swadhyaya and classify it as an NGO doing social work. To do this would be to wholly misinterpret the core of Swadhyaya. There is a critical difference between using bhakti (devotion) as a social force, and doing social work. In Dada's words, "In social work, we go to others with the idea that you are oppressed, and we are here to help you. This creates a social hierarchy. Bhakti is not about helping anyone—it is an expression of the feeling of love toward God. When you lose the

concept of devotion, it becomes social work. When it becomes social work, issues of motive and fruits (i.e., results) enter the picture."

During the tour, I saw the strong tendency many of us have to focus always on tangible results, which include statistics by which we can measure "success" and "progress"—again, partly a result of the economic way in which these terms have been defined in recent decades. Although there is enough evidence to show these kinds of results with Swadhyaya today, looking only at these statistics ignores the real results: results that cannot be quantified but are even more meaningful, results such as an increase in inner peace, harmonious relations, a broader understanding of responsibility and duty, and most importantly, a new awareness of and respect for self—a true "empowerment." It is the goal toward which many social workers, NGOs, governments and self-help classes have been striving, but failing to reach, for years. In fact, in many Swadhyaya villages, there is no longer a need for government projects or for NGOs. The problems are being resolved by individuals and communities.

Swadhyaya's genius is exactly that it is not aimed at any specific social change; and yet, social change occurs in countless ways. Change, however has not come quickly. The early swadhyayees say that they often doubted that anything would ever happen. It took eight to ten years, they say, to begin to see any kind of change. Even today, although the movement continues to grow, the process of change is a slow one. It will certainly continue to be so, as the transformation of the self does not occur overnight. But time is not Dada's concern. "The problems we have in society today will take at least two generations to resolve; and yet we do not even have the patience to wait two years," says Dada. His faith is what has inspired his followers the most. For me, this is the aspect of Dada that takes my breath away: to see, in my lifetime, a man who has the courage to look beyond today's realities and believe in the seemingly extravagant possibility of new world order.

About a month before the tour, my husband and I were invited to attend one of Dada's Sunday discourses in a temple campus in Bombay. It was a rainy morning. We reached the Pathshala, as it is

called, and followed the streams of people who were walking into a big mud-floored, thatched area. The mud had been saturated with the large drips of water coming through the roof, and the entire place was filled with huge puddles. On the right were areas for men and women to "check" their shoes. We did this, and then moved with the stream of people hitching up their saris, pants and dhotis to wade barefoot through the mud. Men and women separated to climb different stairways to a huge room upstairs that was already packed full of people sitting cross-legged.

The woman I sat next to was elderly, in a simple white sari and with a peaceful smile. She had become involved with Swadhyaya through her sister-in-law, who was one of Dada's first listeners. From Gujarat and close to Gandhi, my companion told me that Dada had stayed with them and they had known immediately that this was someone very special, someone who could one day lead the world—not in a political sense, but in a spiritual one. Like most swadhyayees I met, she commented on how Dada's simplicity and genuineness amazed her. "He did not call himself a saint or an enlightened person, but that was one of the first thoughts in my mind—this is what a saint is like," she said to me. Later, she had been part of the first group to go to England on a bhaktipheri. It was some time after I met her that I found out that this simple woman was also a millionairess, involved in running a very successful family business. Her authenticity of spirit and seeming lack of ego were enriching.

I mused to her that day that I was amazed at how many people had filled the room we were in. "There must be least a thousand people in this room!" I said wonderingly. She laughed. "There are ten thousand people here to see Dada," she replied. "There are about a thousand here, and then there are four other rooms that are even bigger than this. They are also filled with people. Dada speaks from here but there are speakers and televisions in the other rooms, so his face and voice are transmitted."

As we were talking, a murmur went through the crowd. Dada had entered the room. Dressed in simple white kurta and dhoti, he had his hands folded in *namaste,* and was walking slowly down the

huge room toward us. In spite of the large number of people in the room, his eyes and body seemed to be greeting each one individually, acknowledging the divine in each soul.

His lecture that day was brief. He had recently returned from medical treatment abroad and still seemed weak, shaky. In his gentle voice, he told his followers that he had come to do their *darshan*—the term normally used to describe a "viewing," of audience with God or a God-like person. He joked several times, laughed, coughed and was human, connecting in the most personal of ways with every individual in the room. Dada talked about an understanding, awareness and respect for a spiritual power greater than us and greater than religion. The path to that power was questioning, learning, and only then believing. He inspired not just with his words, but with his very way of being.

After Dada's discourse, I stood at the window on the upper floor and looked out at the sea of people gathered in one of the muddy rooms below. They had congregated in small groups—laughing, talking and enjoying the aura of peace and companionship that permeated the room. I understood then that one of the most important manifestations of the individual and societal transformations that occurred through Swadhyaya was the recreation of a family of individuals, a family that extended beyond blood, religion, caste or community; a family that could potentially be the world.

My next meeting with Dada was at the end of the tour. He was sitting in the small worship area in the Vidyapeeth, the large institution of learning for young swadhyayees (similar in concept to the one his grandfather had conceived for him). From the huge, empty white marble room where people can stand outside and view the idols within the temple space, we entered the inner room. Dada was sitting casually on a marble stool on which were displayed intricate statues of Yogeshwar. Again in his white kurta and dhoti, he spoke animatedly to us for a few minutes about Yogeshwar and the idols. There was a sense of reverence in the room; after having seen what we had seen, it was impossible not to feel awe for this human being who had inspired the rejuvenation of so many individuals and communities.

We were ushered downstairs to a large room. We sat in a semicircle around Dada, our vision slightly blocked by a beautiful flower arrangement on a pedestal a few feet from us. "I do not need to welcome you," he said to us, "simply because you are family and I am happy that you are here."

The Maulana, in his quivering voice, stood up to speak of his experience with Swadhyaya, first reiterating an emotional statement he had made on the second day of the tour that he would "join the Swadhyaya family." He continued this time, sharing his own experiences, dreams and disappointments. "The dream we had of a great nation at Independence, we could not achieve. Why? Because at Independence, Gandhiji's goal was for freedom, to throw out the Britishers. That was extroverted thinking but we also needed introverted thinking, and that has not happened. We need to go within and question our ways, our lives. This is what I have seen happening in Swadhyaya."

The Maulana's words were significant in their welcome of Swadhyaya. Although Swadhyaya has no religious bars, there are many Muslims who have difficulty accepting Swadhyaya, in part because it accepts idol worship (prohibited in Islam) as a legitimate tool to strengthen faith and devotion. Still, as one Muslim swadhyayee told us during the tour, "We did not like Swadhyaya at first. We thought it was about religion. But then we found that they did not say leave your religion and join us. They talked about peace and happiness. This is true religion."

The Rimpoche, who had not spoken much during the tour, stood up next. He spoke carefully, knowing that the weight of his words would be great. He talked of how he had been moved by what he had seen. But, he said, "There is a fundamental difference that comes between me as a Buddist and Swadhyaya. We do not believe in a divine creator, and this is what your movement is based on. Still, I am in agreement with the essential belief that change in society can come only from change in the individual. Without inner change, the world will soon be destroyed. I believe that the inspiration for this change will come from India."

The Rimpoche's words—in spite of the conflicts with his own Buddhist beliefs—also were an endorsement of Swadhyaya's work. The goals, after all, were the same—but the paths different. Moreover, swadhyayees emphasized that their attempt to establish relationships with brothers and sisters of all religions will continue, whether or not Buddhists or Muslims feel they can follow the Swadhyaya practices. For swadhyayees, their bhaktipheris will continue with no bars for religion. After all, the "brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God" does not discriminate between religions; nor do swadhyayees when it comes to establishing a fundamental interconnectedness with others.

There is no better example of this than Dada himself. Many of those on the tour tried to draw Dada into a discussion about religion, probing to determine his views on the Hindu-Muslim conflict in particular. He resisted all such attempts, as he always has done. "I believe in the validity of all religions." he said. "Swadhyayees organize blood donation camps on the birth of the Prophet Mohammed, and on Christmas. We are not trying to appease anyone; we truly believe in all religions. I am not interested in politics, [in] whether the BJP or the Congress rules. I am not political, nor am I doing anything for political capital. I am only interested in having a human being rule. I am interested in the development of the human being." This was entirely consistent with what we had heard before: that Dada has been approached by several political parties, and has flatly refused to allow any of them to use Swadhyaya as an endorsement for their platforms.

As I am essentially from two cultures, the issue of whether Swadhyaya is applicable to people around the world is particularly important to me. I believe that "developed" cultures have much to learn from India, particularly in the area of spirituality and interconnectedness. I could not help but imagine Swadhyaya in a world context, where it could offer new hope for a changed world.

As of today, there are several tens of thousands of swadhyayees in countries around the world (including the majority of American states), but they still comprise primarily people of Indian origin (with the exception of a community in England that

involves large numbers of people of Western heritage). Can Swadhyaya apply to all others? To accept Swadhyaya, individuals must believe in a higher being or presence. They must also be willing to give up many of the tenets of material living over spiritual being, an especially difficult task in the West. It is not impossible, but it will take time—a factor that Dada has proven is not an obstacle forever. Even if Swadhyaya is not ultimately embraced by non-Hindus, its potential impact is still enormous. There are well over half a billion Hindus in India alone, more than 10 percent of the world's population!

The other major question that occupied many of my thoughts was what would happen to the movement after Dada's time. There have been too many sad examples of great movements that have died with the death of the founding visionary. To date, Swadhyaya has depended on the inspiration and nurturing of Dada. He has driven the movement with his vision, fed it with his own example of selfless living and kept its energy strong with his own faith in the possibilities of the future. Today, Dada is not well, and swadhyayees know that there will come a day when they will have to continue their work without him. They admit that he is irreplaceable, but they say that what he has started will continue. They are also practical. Swadhyaya—though not an organization or institution—runs with tremendous efficiency. There are informal networks (with constantly changing key individuals to avoid usurpation of power and to allow for maximum involvement) that have been built at various levels, groups of Swadhyaya elders—elder brothers and sisters, as they are called—are actively involved in most areas; and most importantly, preparations have been under way for some time to school Dada's daughter (Didi, or elder sister, as she is affectionately called) to lead the next phase. She is not Dada, say many swadhyayees, but then who is?

Mahesh Shah, who steered our tour and a long-time swadhyayee, is confident that Swadhyaya will continue after Dada because its success rests within each individual's own faith and devotion: Dada has started the stream of thoughts, but they now belong to swadhyayees. "Dada analytically places before us some thoughts

which we then internalize," says Shah. "I cannot say that I did something because Dadaji said to. I need to understand it with my own intellect." It is the hope of swadhyayees and those of us watching that this internalization will provide the steam to keep Swadhyaya vitally alive.

"I have nothing new to offer," Dada said to us at that last meeting, smiling gently. "I am only restating what has already been said." These are almost the same words that Mahatma Gandhi often used. I understood Rajiv Vora's words to me that Dada belonged in the highest category of man, with Gandhi. What I saw—in Dada and in Swadhyayees—were living examples of a real search for truth, a re-definition of individual happiness and societal progress, a world of relatedness lost in modern times. And in their quest for individual truth, these swadhyayees are creating truly dramatic transformations in living and thinking.

Notes

1. This article was published earlier, in the January 1997 issue of the journal of the *Institute of Current World Affairs* (U.S.A.).

2. According to Walden Bello's *Dark Victory*, from 1950-1980, the South (for Third World) had a rate of economic growth that was both higher than the North's during the same period, as well as the rate for developed countries during their early stages of development. Poverty and destitution (in economic terms) was actually declining in the 1960s and 1970s in many countries, sans any structural adjustment programs. (*Third World Network*, 1991, pp.27)

3. The Bhagawad Gita, a sacred Indian text, is a piece of the great epic, *The Mahabharata*. In *The Mahabharata,* there is a battle between two related families. Arjuna, one of the five Pandavas, is forced to fight on the battlefield with his own blood brothers. He hesitates and asks Lord Krishna's advice. Krishna advises him that he must obey his dharma duty and fight. This conversation between Arjuna and Krishna on the battlefield is well-known and oft-quoted content of the Bhagavad Gita.

4. The terminology of Swadhyaya may sound male-centered or male-dominated. Phrases like "man to man" or "brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God" may simply, to some of us who are sensitive to the implications of "man"-centered language, that Swadhyaya ignores the equal role

of women. In fact, this is not so. Swadhyaya is grounded in age-old concepts of spirituality and texts like the Gita that use terms like these to include humankind in general. There is also a sense of "political correctness" in India, and Dada would probably have little interest in altering these terms to make a point. In fact, Swadhyaya makes some hotly debated gender issues moot in many senses, since it focuses on the essential "same-ness" of all humans.

5. According to the Upanishads, there are three stages of realization in man's spiritual development: *1) Tana Ivam Asi* (You exist because of Him); *2) Tasya Ivam Asi* (You belong to Him); and *3) Tat Ivam Asi* (That thou Art, or even are God).

6. Jai Yogeshwar means "victory to Yogeshwar." Yogeshwar is the name that swadhyayees use for God. Dada selected this name because it is universal across Hinduism, and does not connote any kind of sectarianism (as using a more popular deity like Krishna might).

7. *Behn* (meaning "sister") and *Bhai* (meaning "brother") are commonly attached to first names when addressing people in Gujarat. With swadhyayees, it seems even more appropriate to do so, given the context of a universal brotherhood.

8. It is common in many rural areas of India to have politicians come and make all kinds of promises to villagers in order to "buy" votes.

Swadhyaya: The Indian Way[1]

Arun Shourie

Why do we not start with the assumption that the rituals, the idols have great significance, that they address an inner need? If you find that a ritual has become mechanical, why condemn it? Why not find a way to endow it with life? If an idol has become a crutch, an object that induces dependence, why look down on the idol or idolatry? Why not find a way to exploit the potential in it, a way by which people will translate into their lives the virtues they associate with their idol in which all values and virtues reside?

And there is the practical side too. These rituals and idols and legends are in the very blood of our people, in their breathing itself. Once they are given a new meaning, a meaning suited to the needs of the time, would the task not get done that much sooner and better? Even if you succeed in condemning and showing up the rituals and idols and concepts, would you not have only demeaned our people in their own eyes, would you not just have made them feel small? And having done that you expect the people to stand up on their own, to do great things!

But that is the point that our reformers have stressed repeatedly—Swami Vivekananda, Gandhiji and others! Why

denounce the ritual, why shatter the idol, why look down on the simple festivals of our people? Why not breathe new meaning into such things, why not infuse another life into them?

Most cannot contemplate the abstract, they cannot be inspired to higher conduct by it, Swami Vivekananda taught, having been awakened to the truth by seeing the veneration of Ramkrishna Paramhamsa for the idol of the Mother. They need a concrete representation, an idol they can see and feel, an idol that embodies an ideal, a confluence of virtues. Instead of denigrating or smashing the idol, why not direct them through the idol to the ideal it embodies? Why not teach them that worship of idol is complete when we see in each of in our fellow-beings that spark of divinity which we associate with the idol? That true worship of that idol is service of the fellow-being.

That has been the way of reformers in India: it is as if an algebraist were to leave the expression within the parentheses unchanged but were to change the sign outside. And these reformers have actually worked revolutions in India—while others have just talked about revolution. This way of looking at things was brought home to me some years ago by one of the most innovative and one of the most effective reformers India has had in the last half-century: Shri Pandurang Shastri Athavale.

Bhakti does not consist in sending petitions to God, he has taught, nor is it rooted in fear, but in loving Him through His creations, His creatures. A ritual is the device to arouse a certain attitude in us, to awaken us to, to inspire us to live certain values. Rituals are important because, after much experimentation and deep contemplation, persons of great insight saw that those attitudes and values would be best awakened in us by those steps. Therefore they are not to be dismissed or circumvented lightly. But it is the attitude—the bhavana (sensitivity or emotional empathy)—in the ritual which is important: endow all work with that bhavana and all work is consecrated, all work becomes an instrument for taking us towards values, all work becomes means to knowing one's self. And there is the other side to the coin: when we have transformed all our work into a device for knowing our

self, we are insulated from the buffeting of "success" and "failure"—for "failure" reveals as much of our inner condition to us as "success."

In a sense because of the work and prodigious output of these great reformers, redefinitions of this kind have become familiar in the last hundred years. But these reformers have done more! They have put the reformulations to work. The reformulations therefore are not just ideas, they are ideas which have worked.

Our people have traditionally venerated trees—even today a Bishnoi village (a community in Rajasthan) is recognizable from a distance: regarding trees as sacred, the villagers in it care for them. The Christian missionary and his progeny—the western-educated Indian—condemn this as animism. Having destroyed the beliefs that once harmoniously bound our lives with nature, they then make a great cause out of ecology and afforestation.

By contrast Shri Pandurang Shastri has led farmers to set up Vrkshamandirs: temples with no walls and domes, temples of trees alone. Land is secured by a group of villages in a particular area. Everyone nurtures the saplings. Swadhyayee families from the neighboring villages take their turn by rotation to take care of the trees and to keep the temple and its surroundings clean.

In the Amritalayam mandirs which have been set up in villages and forested areas by the Swadhyaya movement, there is scarcely a wall: there are two or three five-foot-high brick pillars—from these rise arches of bamboo, and over them and across them stretches a canopy of creepers. Each couple—husband and wife—in the village are pujaris by turn, each couple for a week. They wake up early, bathe, make their way to the temple, clean the courtyard, light the oil lamps, draw certain propitious religious symbols, and create an atmosphere in which everyone who comes feels welcome and at peace.

Transformation accrues of its own. All families contribute plants and creepers, all work together to tend them: such distinctions as there might be are thereby eroded. In the Amritalayam every couple takes turn at being pujaris: people thus learn that function is important, not birth—he among us is the Brahmin who is a

wayfarer in the path of Brahman, Shastriji teaches them. In the week they are pujaris the couple forswear liquor as well as lies—temperance is thus imbibed, along with the habit of telling the truth. A Vrkshamandir caters to twenty-odd villages. Every day by rotation different villages send persons to be pujaris for the day: they work together as a team, as priests tending the temple of trees, caring for the soil, weeding; they sit and labor and eat and pray and sing hymns together. The boons and benefits accrue automatically over time: animosities between villages disappear, distances between castes are dissolved in the pool of devotional labor and working together.

The western-educated Indian, who makes people look down on themselves for their "primitive," "animist" beliefs, then tries to teach people to plant trees on utilitarian and, at best, aesthetic grounds. Shastriji's idiom—like that of Swami Vivekananda, of Gandhiji—is religious.

"There is much we can learn from the trees," Dada teaches the people. He adds:

> Trees are marvelous entities.... Trees are charity manifest—they teach, by their own example to give generously. Like the Lord Shiva, they inhale poisonous gases and exhale life-giving oxygen. They give fruit to those who throw stones at them; their roots are used for medicinal purpose, their flowers and leaves are used in worship; their fruits satisfy our hunger; and their dark cool shade invites the weary traveler to rest. Trees do not expect anything in return for the service the render us; they do not expect even thanks from us; it is their very nature to be unchanging in their generosity and compassion. Truly, therefore, there is much we can learn from the trees. God is not hidden in these temples but reveals Himself in the guise of trees. This God is clothed in the magnificent finery of spring. Vayu, the wind-God, lulls Him to sleep and the brilliant stars in the heavens above send their devotion to Him. He is bathed by the clouds and the birds sing His glory with joy. Your temple of trees nestles in the

> loving bosom of Mother Earth. It has neither doors nor windows; it has only the abundance of your devotion. Your temple is the abode of living, growing and flowering idols in the forms of trees. When you enter this temple do so with a sense of worship; while watering the trees feel the presence if God. This is your spiritual discipline and your way of life. God exists inside the temple and outside the temple too. In worshipping our deities like Hanuman, Tulsi etc., we worship the divinity which is immanent in all beings, in plants, in trees.

The least of the advantage is that this idiom goes straight to the heart of the people. Even more important, such an approach builds on the life of the people, because it starts with a deep respect for what the people already know and do: the teaching leads them to see the deep meaning in what they do as a matter of course. As certainly as the idiom of our westernised elite—superstition, primitive animism—undermines the self-respect of the people and thereby their ability to help themselves, just as surely the idiom of reformers like Shastriji enhances the self-regard and ability of the people.

There is another point that enhances these benefits: the secret lies in what the followers are urged to put to use. For example, Vanavasi, India's forest people, are urged to contribute their know-how to nurture trees and creepers. That skill is special; it is capable of divine work. This is a key concept in Shastriji's Swadhyaya movement.

Ever so often when we feel particularly holy, or grateful, or guilty, or fearful, we console ourselves by giving something in charity, by making a donation to a temple. But the correct phrase, Shastriji teaches, is to give *Tan, Man, Dhan*—in that order, one's time and energy, one's mind and devotion, and only then money etc. Many people who encounter the Swadhyaya movement, are moved by the remarkable transformation which it has brought about in the lives of millions and approach Shastriji with donations of money. They are politely told that donations cannot be accepted till they have given of their own time, and their particular skill: an

accountant must first help look after the accounts of one of the projects, an engineer must first help recharge the wells.

The special skill of fishermen is in catching fish, in making and repairing boats. This skill, this work has been transformed into dharma-work. By contributing their labor and earnings from a bit of their catch over time, fishing communities have built and bought a motor-boat each, the Matsyagandha, the "Floating Temple." It is cared for as a temple; fishermen take turns to man the boat for the day. Earnings from the catch of the Matsyagandha belong to the community as a whole. They are used to help those who are in need within the community, to buy medicines for the sick, to help those without jobs set themselves up, and to acquire civic amenities. Communities of farmers have been led in the same way to transform barren land into wealth of the community.

Earnings from the boats, from these farms are not given by someone to someone as money is when we give it to a beggar, for instance. They are consecrated to the deity. The person who receives help receives it from the deity as prasad. The stigma of inferiority, the burden of dependence are thereby minimized. Fasts, festivals, pilgrimages have been similarly transformed. Where the movement has taken hold, on Bali-pratipada day, the new year day by the Hindu calendar, all men, women and children from a village visit the neighboring village. At the outskirts of the latter village they draw lots to determine the house at which they shall have lunch; the hospitality is returned by the first village in the same way. The consequences flow as a matter of course: the feeling of community is strengthened, taboos of caste, the distances of income etc. are overcome, families develop bonds.

A pilgrimage is not just a journey to petition a bank-manager, Shastriji has taught swadhyayees; it means withdrawing one's mind from the pursuits and preoccupation of our daily existence. Swadhyayees therefore visit the pilgrimage centers of course—as these have been identified by our seers as specially charged places—but in addition they visit villages on the way to and around those centers to disseminate teachings of the vedic religion and the Gita. Again, the benefits flow of their own: everyone

becomes a student—pilgrims get to know other villages and villagers; everyone—irrespective of caste etc.—becomes a preacher, proclaiming lofty ideals and teachings to others; the pilgrims feel that much more bound to live up to those ideals themselves; the message of our religion and culture is broadcast, society is thereby strengthened. Indeed, these peregrinations in the villages have become a keystone of the movement. They are known as bhaktipheris, devotional tours. Every swadhyayee devotes at least fifteen days a year to touring in the villages. His or her sole object is his or her own spiritual growth, he goes merely to learn, to get to know, to make friends. He must accept absolutely nothing from those he visits, he must politely refuse even ordinary hospitality. Benefits accrue in many ways, at many levels. The spiritual growth of the individual makes for a better society. The ones he gets to know, see his conduct and are thereby encouraged to improve their own lives. Often the outcomes transcend individuals.

In the Saurashtra region, the hostility toward outsiders of Mers—mainly agriculturists—and Kharawas—mainly fisherfolk—had been legendary; it often led to violence. All efforts to keep them from assaulting each other had failed. Had the matter gone to one of our modern experts in "conflict resolution" he would have drawn up list of "issues," suggested formulae for give-and-take and drawn up contract, a treaty. But no specific issue was the cause. When the age-old enmity was put to Shastriji, he therefore did not focus on an issue, he focused on changing the atmosphere, the air and water so to say. Swadhyayees began visiting each community. Both communities developed trust in them. Eventually both appealed to Shastriji to bring them together.

Shastriji did not seal that consummation by drawing up a contract. He told them to organize Satyanarain puja (recitation of certain specific mythological stories to convey the message of gratitude to God). There must be 1008 couples from each community; the couples must sit alternately: a Kharwa couple, a Mer couple, a Kharwa couple; each couple must perform the puja. And to avoid expense, Shastriji simplified the puja so that it could be completed with just a few flowers, water and rice.

When the puja had been completed by such large numbers from each community, by such large intermingled numbers, and with Satyanarain (God) as their witness, the leaders of both communities forswore hostility to each other....

Such experiments of Indian reformers, of whom Shastriji is the most recent example, are a result of deep reflection and insight. They are innovative ideas. They are ideas which build on notions and practices that lie embedded deep in the psyche of our people. For that reason they are Indian ideas but they can revise and transform other cultures as well. They are the ideas that work.

Note

1. The above article was syndicated in several Indian newspapers by the author in 1995. It formed part of a series of three articles entitled "The Indian Way."

Swadhyaya: A Movement of the Spirit

Gopal Krishna

The genius of Indian civilization is continuously creative. It expresses itself from time to time through movements of self-renewal. One such great movement of the second half of the twentieth century is Swadhyaya. It is the creation of the divinely inspired man of God Shri Pandurang Shastri Athavale, affectionately known as Dadaji among his followers and co-workers, whose life has been dedicated to the renewal of our civilization.

Swadhyaya is a movement of the spirit. Its fundamental premise seems to me to be that man is a spiritual being, infused with the permanent presence of the divine in his being. This presence of divinity sanctifies man. Knowledge of it elevates him to his true spiritual status. Such a man informed by self-awareness (cultivation of which is the true endeavor of Swadhyaya) becomes, or rather makes himself into, an agent of the ever-present divinity. He recognizes divinity in himself and in all other creatures—with him recognition of divinity in all the creation becomes the primary content of his consciousness—and that forms the foundation of his bond of affection and fellowship with them. He is infused with devotion to God and love for all creatures.

That a movement grounded in such a philosophical anthropology should flourish in the second half of the twentieth century in what must be regarded as the most advanced regions of India (Gujarat and Maharashtra) is a remarkable testimony to the persistence of the religious consciousness of the Indian people. The religious tradition of India is very ancient and is continuously renewed by divine incarnations and by semi-divine teachers, preceptors, men of thought and action. Swadhyaya belongs to that tradition of religious self-renewal.

Swadhyaya was born out of a profound sense of anxiety for the spiritual and social well-being of the Indian people, who, under the impact of historical misfortunes and the corrosive influences of contemporary civilization, had become alienated from their own traditions and in the process had become spiritually, morally and materially impoverished. The spirit of fellowship had given way to indifference to one's fellow beings; of robust self-assertion to fear and feeble compromises; of honor to dissimulation; of moral rectitude to manipulation. The founder's concern over the depleted spiritual, moral and material condition of the Indian people led him to found the Swadhyaya movement, whose primary focus is on bhakti, devotion, with Sri Krishna, Yogeshwar (the lord of the Yogins), as its recipient, and the Gita as its master text. That Krishna bhakti could elicit such an astonishing response and generate and sustain such a vast variety of activities leading to individual and collective renewal in a world in which religious spirit is on the decline comes as something of a marvelous surprise.

The God of the Gita is a constant companion to man, in this case Arjuna. In a sense man only fulfils God's design, but man is not a passive agent. He is a thinking, and in some measure autonomous, being. It is because he is a thinking being that he experiences doubts, has to confront moral dilemmas and has to make right (i.e. dharmic) choices. It is Arjuna who has to fight the just war, with the aid and advice of his companion and friend Sri Krishna.

This autonomy of man, in the discharge of his dharmic duty, aided by God is one of the key precepts of Swadhyaya. Taking the

Gita as the guide, the founder of the movement advises its adherents to pursue the three prescribed paths of bhakti (devotion), karma (action), and jnana (knowledge), exercising critical reason in all they do and dedicating their endeavors to the divine Yogeshwar. This too comes from the Gita, where Krishna advises Arjuna to dedicate his works to Him alone. Work done in that spirit liberates man from bondage while enabling him to fulfil his dharma. All Swadhyaya activities are undertaken in that spirit.

The varied activities of Swadhyaya (Yogeshwar Krushi, Matsyagandha, Vrkshamandir, Amritalayam, Pathshala and Vidyapith and a host of others) have exerted wholesome influences on those who participate in them and all those who interact with them. But the founder insists that the primary drive behind all Swadhyaya effort is bhakti, devotion to Yogeshwar. The activity may result in social benefits but that is not the end swadhyayees pursue. It is a welcome, but secondary, result. Dadaji once said:

> We are trying to bridge the gulf between the haves and the have-nots but we are not socialists. We are trying to make women aware of their strength, instill self-esteem in them, but we are not women-liberators. We are trying to improve and change the educational system and have started schools with this aim, but we are not educationists. We do not encourage religious fundamentalism. We are not interested in active politics. We regard the downtrodden as the children of God and work for their welfare, but we are not social workers. The Swadhyaya family works according to divine teachings of the ancient sages.

Swadhyaya's principal method of work designed to establish mutuality between people is bhaktipheri. In an age where mutuality outside the family has almost disappeared, bhaktipheri initiates human contact that is not exploitative. It restores conditions for a living, active community. This community experiences spiritual and moral unity which underpins its life of work and pleasure. Swadhyaya generates a sentiment of fellowship, which is so lacking

in our society, and which we so sorely need for reestablishing wholesome collective life for ourselves. Fellowship leads to sharing, which sustains the community.

Swadhyaya endeavors to strengthen the family. Modern conditions have tended to undermine this primary institution of human life. Its weakening has given rise to disorientation, violence, want of an anchor to a very large number of people. Among the swadhyayees family is cherished and one can see its beneficial results in their domestic lives as well as work. It also overcomes many of the divisions which give rise to social conflicts in our time, those focusing on class, caste, religion, gender and age.

It is important to notice what Swadhyaya is not: it is not ascetic; it resists resignation and world renunciation; it is not political. Dadaji rejects all contemporary ideologies—individualism, socialism, capitalism, liberalism and the rest of it. In one of his speeches he said Swadhyaya stands for Iswarwad, i.e. devotion to God, from which flows devotion to man, nature and its other creatures. It generates virtue, self-respect and a sense of responsibility.

In its intellectual orientation, in its programs and in its actions, Swadhyaya is often very radical. A movement dedicated to renewal has to reject those parts of entrenched ideas and institutions which, in the light of reason and experience, are seen to be inimical to individual and collective well-being. Thus Swadhyaya does not acknowledge untouchability; on the contrary it insists on the brotherhood of all, to be realized through the recognition of divinity present in all. Gandhiji had taught this truth to us a long time ago, and swadhyayees practice it in their everyday life with commendable results.

Swadhyaya is also a cultural movement of the highest importance. Its systematic and dedicated promotion of Sanskrit through its educational institutions and its endeavours to disseminate Sanskritic culture through its activities have the effect of taking Sanskrit and the culture it embodied to the hitherto marginalized sections of our society. This is a process of higher cultural integration of India which has been in abeyance for an unconscionably long time.

Hindu civilization holds God to be central to man's self-awareness. The greatest of art, the most sublime of music, the highest expression of virtue in life—all these are indubitably inspired by an overwhelming sense of the presence of God, infusing all that there is. Swadhyaya reaffirms this truth and has demonstrated through its many activities its abiding efficacy.

I myself, alas!, have no religious feeling, but I am well aware of its centrality to the life of India, and I am therefore moved by a sense of reverence for the Swadhyaya movement and its great founder and preceptor. He is indeed a renewer of our civilization.

Celebrating Swadhyaya

N. R. Sheth

Krutagnata samaroh, 1994–95. Celebration of gratitude. Bombay, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Rajkot.[1] They were primarily celebrations of gratitude to Dada. In his speech at each place, Dada began by saying that it was he who should express gratitude to them—the hundreds of thousands of people who had accepted Swadhyaya and worked for constant expansion of the parivar (fraternity).

The celebrations were, indeed, multi-splendored. They were celebrations of numbers. Several hundred thousand people from nearby and faraway places gathered on each occasion to share their joy and pride and greet Dada. The people were also celebrating the swadhyayee energy and commitment for hard work. Thousands of people had worked as volunteers to plan and organize a variety of functions and arrangements at each place. There were achievements to be celebrated. Men and women had gone through a learning process to participate in collective recitation of passages from the scriptures or the verses of daily prayer. The Swadhyaya creativity was celebrated. The stage settings, cultural programs and methods of mass greetings witnessed at each place brought tears of joy to many special invitees and inspired exclamations such as "divine,"

"unbelievable," "beyond my wild expectations." The swadhyayees had a lot to celebrate. They celebrated with great gusto and alacrity. One could almost see them moving in and out of a divine stream.

What did the celebration mean for the uninitiated spectator? Over-arching approbation. Amazement. Disbelief. Humility. Much of what could be expected of sensible onlookers. And, some solid expectations.

Solid expectations, without a doubt. Not all spectators were plain onlookers. Some were habitual analysts and critics, thanks to their calling. Others carried responsibility to manage a community or a specific service. They articulated their expectations of Swadhyaya in clear terms. Each celebration was followed by an informal dialogue between Dada and the local bureaucrats and opinion leaders. The dignitaries usually expressed feelings at the top of their minds. They could never have known what Swadhyaya really is and what it is capable of achieving if they had missed the celebration. They never imagined such precious change could be so successfully achieved in human behavior, habits and attitudes with insignificant material cost and hardly noticeable structure of authority and control. Most people with interest in quality of life in government and other sectors of public service were impressed by the Swadhyaya method of approaching and persuading people to move towards a more harmonious, work-oriented, environmentally friendly way of life. Many bureaucrats raised questions: Could swadhyayees take up specific projects to improve public sanitation in slums? Could they help in augmenting water resources in urban and rural areas? Could the Swadhyaya mode of education be expanded to cover primary schools under Swadhyaya leadership and control? Could the Swadhyaya mainspring of divine love and brotherhood be used to reform a wayward ethnic group which has defied the law and police for decades on end?

The considered response from Dada and his leading followers to such suggestions or requests is: We are not social reformers. We go to a place or community not because the people there are backward, wayward or illiterate. We first construct bridges of love, devotion and self-development over a period and incidentally introduce the

need for development of character and personal habits. We understand your anxiety on social reality and your expectations from us in the background of our achievements. But we cannot make social interventions the way you want. The end-products which you recognize as social reform or social change are by-products of our work.

A typical intellectual response to this Swadhyaya position is one of disappointment. The professionals and social thinkers find it hard to comprehend the reluctance to participate actively in the process of socioeconomic change with so much achievement, such obvious potential and enviable human assets. Indeed, they have seen or heard about some sterling attainments of Swadhyaya in the area of conservation of water resources and drainage of used water in villages. This information has served to raise expectations of Swadhyaya contribution to immediate social agenda. A senior bureaucrat holding responsibility for education was keen to hand over some primary schools to Swadhyaya to influence children's quality of life at an early age. However, he learned that such action does not lie within the territory charted for Swadhyaya work. Such knowledge reinforces disappointment and doubts. The obvious conclusion is: Swadhyaya is good and uplifting for the swadhyayees who would constitute a small fraction of the population for a long time. For the society at large, it is okay—a demonstration of a noble and exemplary way of life. In the background of the message of universal brotherhood, these people find it hard to comprehend the Swadhyaya reluctance to play any role in vital matters of relations between castes and communities when conflict arises or social justice is at stake.

This kind of response is likely to become more common and sharper as the Swadhyaya fraternity proceeds with its celebrations of achievements and aspirations. The directions in which Swadhyaya plans and programs move and those in which others want them to move will obviously run their course. Where and how they meet and part will determine the thrust and import of how Swadhyaya is borne by the rest of the society. Sometimes, for instance, the Swadhyaya principle of total non-political functioning tends to be treated as an open issue at the middle levels of the

fraternity. Extrapolations are then made to suggest a state could be managed more efficiently under Swadhyaya rule than under any other regime. This is perhaps an apocalyptical account. It is mentioned here to underscore a need for clear and firm communication with the outside world on the existing boundaries of Swadhyaya work.

The emerging interface between Swadhyaya and the wider society is important in the context of a belief that Swadhyaya offers an effective and viable model for management of socioeconomic inequality and injustice. Projects such as Matsyagandha (community-owned fishing vessels), Yogeshwar krushi (collaborative village-level farming), Amritalayam (community-based center of worship), Vrkshamandir (orchard-plantation managed by a nexus of villages) and Shree darshanam (farm managed by a nexus of villages) are explained as experiments in creation of impersonal wealth and a system of distribution with full preservation of human dignity and without the corrupting effects of wealth witnessed in capitalism as well as socialism. All outsiders who witness the functioning of any of the projects mentioned above are happily surprised at the spirit of love, equality and dignity pervading the production and distribution processes in them. However, when questions are raised about extending the salient principles of these experiments to any of the existing systems of enterprise, answers tend to get clouded with doubt and vagueness.

The socioeconomic model of Swadhyaya then turns into a laboratory model, governed by neatly controlled conditions. In my view, this is the correct and, from everybody's point of view, the most rewarding outlook on Swadhyaya. It is a social and cultural island which, of course, has excellent capability and wisdom to continuously extend its boundaries to invite people from the outside. The various products of its experiments are a matter of great pride, joy and rededication for the swadhyayees. For the rest, they are demonstrations of the noble, the lofty, the worshipful, the beacon of divinity in our midst.

Swadhyaya does not need to take on the whole world of hatred, jealously, selfishness, greed, power, divisiveness and uncouth consumerism. In the current global scenario bedeviled by these

self-styled angels, Swadhyaya cannot hope to strive for an impressive resolution of forces. What it can, however, strive for is enlargement of its territory and thereby contribute to the narrowing of the forces of evil. In doing so, it may have to take progressively greater notice of the expectations and responses from the environment. The greatest challenge in trekking along this path is how to sustain balance between the constraints set by the Swadhyaya principle and the limits of the splendor of public approbation. As time goes, the dialogue with the outsider may become more complex and demanding. More and more questions will be asked about whether Swadhyaya is Hindu. Professional analysts and observers will look around for islands comparable to Swadhyaya and return with unanticipated questions. The response of the fraternity at various levels to events in the environment may change and become diverse over time. That may entail need for redefinition of what should be transacted in a dialogue and how. But there is no escape from such transactions. All islands need to build and keep bonds with the wider territory around them.

At the present state of our reckoning, the evils in human character and relationships are likely to grow and expand their hold over us by the day. In such a situation, one often asks, what can Swadhyaya do? Let us not fall in a trap of reason. Let us remember that the more we are vulnerable to evil forces and the more we find it difficult to comprehend the role of interventions such as Swadhyaya, the more we need them. It is precisely when there is an impending storm at sea that we need a beacon of light. A beacon of light as steady, as powerful, as serene, as reassuring, as ennobling as Swadhyaya.

Notes

1. The celebrations were held at other places too. I have mentioned those centers where I was present

2. I am grateful to Professor R.K. Srivastava for a gentle but effective telephonic push and to Vasanthi V.A. for secretarial help.

Swadhyaya Revisited

Majid Rahnema

It is now more than seven years since I first met Dadaji and the large parivar (family) of over three million swadhyayees he has constituted since the fifties. The visit prompted me then to write a small paper in which I reflected some of the extraordinary impressions it had left on me.[1] Since then, I have kept in touch with the smaller family of friends I had made within Swadhyaya, continuing to learn from the many things that were happening there. Every visit to Swadhyaya land was, for me, a time to wonder, to learn, to make new friends and to bring back the seeds of new thought-provoking questions. I rejoiced at the sight of the small trees which were now growing in the Yogeshwar krushi (God's farms) and the Upavans (God's orchards). I shared the pride of the swadhyayee fishermen who had succeeded in increasing the number of their Matsyagandhas (the floating temples). And I witnessed the rapid increase of the inspiring songs which were being produced as a result of their love for their Yogeshwar and their Pandurang Athavale Shastri. Yet, each of these visits has left me with the feeling of an unfinished journey, as if to reconfirm my earlier impressions that the real Swadhyaya is elsewhere. And there

is the area which continues to fascinate and to leave me with ever-unresolved questions.

The last time I was in India, the swadhyayees were celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of Dadaji, and it was good to see next to him, as always, his loving daughter, the indefatigable, charismatic Didijee, this Shakti-like creature whom I once affectionately called the "youngest mother of the greatest family on earth, including her own father." The visit was shorter this time, and more "officially" organized to accommodate a rather impressive number of foreign visitors who had been invited for the occasion. And being more focused on the ceremonies celebrating Dadaji's birthday, less times was devoted to smaller and more intimate encounters with the real actors. Yet, together with some more curious friends, I still managed to visit some villages and families I had met seven years ago, just to feel the changes that had occurred in the meantime.

In the seven months which have followed this visit, many times I have tried to fix my latest impressions and share them with readers. I had promised Raman Srivastava to send him my notes in time for this collective work to be edited, yet, the more I tried to make sense of the multifarious questions raised by Swadhyaya as a movement for social change, the more it appeared to me as a fascinating puzzle, difficult to be explained in a short paper. Then I remembered that before leaving India, Srivastava and others had wanted me to answer to a couple of questions on the visit. Hence, this attempt to present my "paper" in the form of an imaginary interview with him, and the pursuit of a continuing dialogue with myself on the subject.

The search for alternatives to development

R.S.—Seven years ago, when you came to know Swadhyaya, you presented it to your readers as a success story of significant importance in the recent history of people's own search for new alternatives to development. To what extent do you still subscribe to whatever you said in that first article?

M.R.—The encounter with the Swadhyaya family happened at a moment of my life when I was actually trying to find out whether new alternatives to development should not replace the search some of us had started earlier for alternative forms of development. For the various efforts at giving a "human face" to development, at making it "endogenous," "participatory" or "sustainable," continued to be based on an assumption that I had come to consider dangerous and unacceptable. The assumption was that pre-economistic cultures had to be saved from their "underdevelopment" and, to this end, they had to renounce their traditional modes of living and being as no longer suitable to their own welfare.

My search was for radically different types of interaction for social (and personal) change. I sought a radically different underlying assumption. No change, I felt, could be meaningful or ethically right, were it not prompted, desired and conceived by the cultures in question. Hence, both the concepts and the modes of intervention had to be chartered only by them. I also thought that, as a rule, "outsiders" were not in a position to perceive people's problems in all their complexity. At best, they could bring the "insiders" the lessons of their own experiences, for whatever they were worth. Those interested in this type of interaction had, therefore, first, to listen to the grassroots populations in searching for new answers to their questions; second, to start a friendly dialogue with them to see whether they wanted them to offer any contribution in the particular fields of their knowledge.

The Swadhyaya story came to me as a refreshing confirmation of the many lessons I had learned from the grassroots communities elsewhere, ones trying to find original ways of regenerating their life space. It appeared to me as a most interesting case study for students concerned with social change in a troubled and constantly changing world. It could show how a number of so-called underdeveloped people were successfully "developing" and adapting themselves to outside changes, in ways much more effective and intelligent than what the most professional "experts" in the fields were able to offer them.

Swadhyaya's specificities

R.S.—What are the things that particularly impressed you in Swadhyaya?

M.R.—When I came back from my second visit to the field, I jotted a few notes, some of which I could reproduce here as tentative first answer to your question:

1. Swadhyaya, unlike development, is not a basically economic undertaking. It is not aimed at programming people's lives, with a view to facilitating their integration into a wider economic system, perceived as ideal and desirable. It is not a project to provide the dropouts of that system with goods and services that are presumed to be their needs and the condition for them to share a bigger part of the system's benefits. It is a genuine, open-ended attempt by a group of culturally and geographically defined people to live differently, to think and to act together, in their own language, with a view to responding to the many changes affecting their lives.

2. The words most repetitively used, in documents prepared by professionals, developers and planners, are like plastic tools alien to the "target populations" for whom they are fabricated—among them words such as "productive," "cost-effective," "scientific," "action-oriented," "economically sound," all of them alien to the real language of real people. There, change is perceived generally as a blessing coming from without, and through professionally designed interventions. Listening is a an odd word, only used by non-professional and marginal people. What a refreshing thing to see that a whole movement bases its philosophy on the art of listening, in particular, to one's own and inner voice (antarnaad).

3. Talking to Dadaji I had the feeling that, for him, a true swadhyayee is a God-like artist who should seek primarily to develop his or her innate gifts. As the artist is also a social being who needs to make economic arrangements in order to live in freedom and dignity, he or she should belong to an "economy." This is very different from reducing a human being to homo economicus, that is, an individual defined only by his economic needs and his relative

capacity to make money or produce material wealth. As such, Swadhyaya posits itself as a transformative and holistic project. It is aimed at making humans conscious of their "divine" gifts and of the organic ties binding them both to the cosmic order and to their sociocultural roots. Economy is here re-embedded in society, to use a Polanyian term.

4. Dada says that the transformative processes which are necessary to the full blossoming of everyone's gifts cannot be achieved from without. There is a stupendous, a divine force within every individual that supersedes any other. Contrary to all other external sources of power, it is also one which is always available to its owner. This inner source of ultimate wealth and power is, by definition, superior and more available than any external one. The central and the most important task for everyone, is therefore, first, to gain awareness of its existence, second, to learn how to be constantly nurtured by it.

5. Once a person (or a community) has realized that one can and should rely on this divine force (the Yogeshwar) within, self-reliance becomes an evidence, a matter of fact. There is no need for anyone to be taught about its positive and regenerative attributes.

6. That very fact may well explain why Dada has categorically refused to accept any financial or technical assistance from any national or international donor outside the movement. Yet the "organization" is said to have assets exceeding of hundreds of millions of rupees. If that is the case, Swadhyaya is, to my knowledge, the first contemporary grassroots "movement" to have proved that even material wealth can be produced without money.

R.S.—Do you find that these earlier impressions are still accurate?
M.R.—The notes I referred to are still quite important for the history and the understanding of the movement's basic philosophy. There are, however, signs indicating that the growth of the movement has somehow given the organizers a more decisive role in propagating the parivar lines. I also gathered the impression that some younger swadhyayees want the movement to be more visible on the political and social scenes. What I say could be quite superficial

since I found little time to discuss it with the groups concerned. Yet, at moments, it seemed to me that the earlier insistence on the discovery of one's own truth was overshadowed by the zeal of some more vocal and influential activists, eager to spread the right words to everyone. Were these observations more than personal impressions of the moment, they could represent a change in the ways Dadaji's earlier teachings are actually implemented.

The "economics" of swadhyaya

R.S.—Among the initiatives taken by Swadhyaya, there are many whose implementation requires substantial amounts of money and equipment. Would you explain to the readers how such economic performances are financed, and by whom?

M.R.—To provide this question with a meaningful answer, one has to avoid the conventional economistic and managerial approach, trying, instead, to see how Swadhyaya has actually done it.

In the early days of the movement, Dadaji came out with a new concept called "impersonal wealth." He classified under this term all the economic and productive activities which people performed for the sole sake of the "God within them." As a rule, those represented the fruits of the two-days-a-month bhakti, which most Hindu believers offer the Yogeshwar as a sign of their devotion to Him. Being aimed at pleasing the God within and expressing one's gratitude to Him, such a wealth can neither be translated nor evaluated in economic terms.

To give an example, when, for the first time, some three hundred thousand swadhyayees held their first All-India gathering in Prayag (Allahabad) in 1986, or more recently, when larger meetings that brought together over a million people, were organized for the seventy-fifth anniversary of Dadaji (or the Human Dignity Day), some money was actually "spent." But no one was paid to do the required jobs. There wasn't a "payroll" as such. Every swadhyayee offered the skill, the time, the energy and the nipunata (efficiency or creativity) proper to him or her. All expenses were thus met by people's gifts and "immaterial" voluntary contributions to their

wider family. Had such meetings been planned and budgeted according to rules and procedures proper to such institutions as UNDP, the World Bank, the Olympics or other corporations, not only would that have required tens of millions of dollars, but would also have utterly failed to produce the extraordinary chemistry proper to such convivial events. When swadhyayees decide to get together, regardless of the number and the place, the "cash" that goes into such operations is only a minute part of the voluntary works offered by everyone for the occasion.

To come back to your question, Swadhyaya is, no doubt, in need of cash for many of its activities and operations. To my knowledge, that is provided by the family's members whose "personal wealth" allows them to respond to the financial needs of the movement, in addition to their particular form of nipunata. But, even then, I was told that Dada accepts their money only when he is convinced that they are offering it to the Yogeshwar within, not to Swadhyaya as an organization.

I would like to finish this discussion on money and the "economic resources" required for such ventures with a fact that is often overlooked by economists. The most significant achievements of a movement like Swadhyaya have nothing, or very little, to do with money. A striking and concrete example of this fact is in Dadaji's handling of the "caste" phenomenon.

Swadhyaya redefines untouchability

R.S.—Could you elaborate on this example?

M.R.—On my first visit to Swadhyaya land, I had already been highly impressed by the most unconventional ways Dadaji had addressed the "caste" traditions. I realized that he was systematically using the life–enhancing foundations of Hindu philosophy to combat the negative and discriminatory aspects of the caste system. He starts his argument on the subject by placing it in historical context. He reminds his audience that, for the ancient Rishis and founders of Hinduism, caste distinctions represented an attempt at organizing society, with a view to making the best use of the gifts

and capacities proper to different members. Thus, caste corresponded to a culturally defined distribution of social tasks rather than some kind of class structure. Later, the concept was corrupted by those interested in maintaining their usurped privileges.

Yet, he goes on, it remains true that whoever is not, or can not be, "touched" by the grace of the God within one is, by definition, "untouchable," regardless of one's social origins. This form of "untouchability" is, for Dada, the main challenge to a true swadhyayee. In other words, as long as one is unable to see the question through the eyes of the God within, no legal or institutional remedy can change people's attitudes toward social untouchability.

Revolutionary changes in caste relationships

It is on this philosophical background that, some six years ago, Dadaji first thought to use the ceremonies of the Diwali festivities as a means to give a new sense to the whole idea of "caste." He suggested then that swadhyayee villagers would visit each other on the occasion. But he left it to God to indicate who would visit whom, by proposing that lots be drawn to this effect. That simple device led the first "untouchables" to be welcomed, in their own homes and for a number of days, by their swadhyayee brahmin friends, and vice versa. And as these first encounters miraculously broke the ice of the inter-caste mutual fears, other activities followed, bringing the stream of newly discovered friendships to gently melt the old, rigid blocks of ice.

The last time I was in Ahmedabad, a wonderful group of activists invited a couple of friends and me to visit the "untouchables'" quarter, where the struggle against social untouchability was pursued in a much wider context. The stories we were told by the different men and women who lived in this neighborhood and worked with the people were almost incredible. They represented nothing less than a quiet and silent revolution that has basically changed the relationships between the Brahmins and the "untouchables"—as well as Muslims and Hindus—now integrated in the Swadhyaya family. When Sawan Behn, a young "untouchable,"

with her shining eyes, told us simply that "the Patel community came to our house. And from morning to evening, we were together and feeling happy," one could see that, beyond the laws and structures of a powerless nation-state and beyond thousands years of caste-based traditions, new forms of governance and human relations were already being born, paving the way to a different type of society. In such moments, in particular, one could realize how small and unimportant is the role of money and "economy"—or the official institutions—in major social changes of this magnitude.

Can "bigger" remain as beautiful?

R.S.—You seem to share the view that "small is beautiful." As such you have often expressed your worries when creative micro-initiatives are led—often because of their success—to face the contradictions arising from their growth. Could you think aloud on the effects of such a growth on Swadhyaya, particularly from an organizational perspective?

M.R.—As an observer and an "outsider," I cannot deny that the growth phenomenon has already confronted Swadhyaya with problems which did not exist in the first three decades of its life. To my knowledge, although the parivar has now over three million members, it is still operating like the very small family of its founders. Dadaji and a number of close friends who started the bhaktipheris, some fifty years ago, are still naturally in a highly privileged position within the family. The hundreds of local mota bhais acting as the "elder" swadhyayees in different villages constitute the family's second circle of "power." Another group of leaders, some of them quite vocal and influential, act at the levels of Amritalayams, Yogeshwar krushis, Matsyagandhas and other operational activities. These constitute a third inner circle. This informal "hierarchy" was perhaps, for long, strategically important to help people internalize the new modes of interaction proposed by Dadaji. The question, however, arises: How long would it be possible to allow the movement to keep expanding and growing in

importance while its members continued to interact in the same convivial and unstructured manner that they did in the fifties?

Other important questions come to mind which are not only organizational and managerial but also address even more substantive issues of an ideological and generational character.

Growing tensions in an economized world

R.S.—Could you elaborate on some of them?

M.R.—To give an example, I was told by friends that some of the younger rank and file members of the movement were lately pressing for more "militant," "activist," and "interventionist" types of action, asking that Swadhyaya become more actively involved in hotter sociopolitical issues now facing the country. Others want it to play a more visible role at national levels.

At the same time, the many problems arising from India's integration in the world market and in the international consumer society prompt particularly the younger "angry" generation to internalize the latter's corrosive "values." Constantly and systematically exposed to the new gods of economic progress and social success, the most fragile and hopeless amongst them are the first to lose their culturally built immune defense systems. One has to admit that although these modern gods are soul-less, when they are professionally programmed, they can often affect one's vision of the "God within one." Intergenerational differences are thus exacerbated, and the traditional methods of their resolution no longer operative.

When the "family" was small, and so were the differences separating each one's perception of reality, it was easier to stick to the old *wu-wei*, "non-interventionist" principle of governance, and to "intervene" downward as little as possible. But could the same things be done now that the family has reached the size of a small country, and where many huge TV screens and ever more loudspeakers are necessary to pass on the message of Dadaji to the millions organized to listen to him? What if some of the "masses" now representing the new urban contradictions would seek to

"modernize" the family along totally new lines, or eventually seek to "organize" the "Gods within" in more "scientific," more "productive," or "politically effective" ways? How would the older *mota bhais* react to such pressures? And, were Dadaji to leave the scene, how strong are the chances that ensuing tensions would be resolved in the same spirit of wisdom and creativity? A couple of foreign guests, who participated in the last "Human Dignity Day" ceremonies, observed to me that in the visits they had made, the "dialogical" and "bottom-up," the "non-interventionist" principles on which the movement had built its legitimacy, were not as visible as they had expected. Although the veneration and sometimes the unconditional love of the father and the guru has very deep and solid roots in Hindu traditions, the growing personal "cult" of Dadaji was similarly perceived by others in the light of some of its disquieting historical precedents. The "cult" syndrome had worried them during the mass celebrations where the feelings of quasi-adoration for Dadaji were expressed in the over-mediatized languages of modern public relations, particularly dear to the professionals of great spectacular events.

No doubt, Westernized intellectuals tend generally to "problematize" some of these questions in ways that are sometimes ethnocentrical, attributing to practices and rituals born of a particular culture, meanings that are not the same for the latter. Yet, the fact remains that when the size of a group crosses a threshold beyond which the relationships amongst its members are affected by more abstract institutional or managerial considerations, the "panopticon" syndrome starts to produce regimentation effects. Persons in position of power tend then to use the veneration for the guru to promote other less-disinterested ends, a phenomenon which sometimes prevents the ordinary grassroots person from fully expressing his or her truths. Such phenomena are common to fast-expanding movements. If nothing is done about them, in time, they could produce at least two unfortunate effects: a weakening of the original basic thrust of Dadaji to preserve the primacy of the "God within" and, consequently, an impediment to the free upward movement of the initiatives from below.

I should add, however, that whenever I had the privilege of sharing these views with Dadaji himself, I found him quite aware of the difficult questions raised by the growth of the "family." On many occasions, he himself took the initiative in sharing his preoccupations on the subject. However, the way he has often found the most ingenious answers to the questions previously facing the parivar continues to give me hope that he would find equally ingenious responses to the ones referred to. The future of the movement depends, indeed, on the ways in which such questions will actually be addressed.

Total revolutions originate in the self

R.S.—On the whole, you seem to have lost much of your earlier belief that "mass movements" or revolutions can substantially bring to the subjugated and the oppressed what they need in order to regenerate their capacities to freely organize their lives. To what extent has the Swadhyaya encounter affected your views on this subject?

M.R.—It is true that when I was much younger, the world appeared to me so full of intolerable injustices that my Marxist inclinations prompted me "to lose no time" on what I believed to represent a "bourgeois" fear of action. I took it for granted that people everywhere belonged to two distinctly recognizable camps: the oppressors and the oppressed, the masters and the slaves, the rich and the poor, the wicked colonialists and the brave nationalists, etc. In that context, it was everyone's duty to take the right side and to "do something" (anything) to help the subjugated to free themselves. And "scientific materialism" was there to prove that history was also on the side of the goodhearted revolutionaries and the oppressed freedom fighters. The first spectacular "achievements" of the Soviet revolution, followed by the hopes arising from the collapse of the colonial order, were to confirm the believers in their binary vision of the world.

What happened, especially in the last twenty years, showed clearly that such a simplistic vision of reality could only lead to

tragic mistakes and disillusions. This quite dramatic period of modern history also signified the total failure of mass interventions based on abstract ideologies and totalizing categorizations. It ultimately served the "wicked" within every camp to suppress everywhere the relatively small areas of freedom where more generous human beings were trying to build a better world for themselves.

The lessons to draw from these trends should indeed not lead to negative positions. It is most natural and, indeed, right to "take the side" of the oppressed whenever they act together in order to defend themselves. But those crying out for help are not abstract entities defined only by their belonging to a particular social, racial or economic "category" of persons. They should be considered—and listened to—as individual human beings whose actual sufferings call for a compassionate response, regardless of any other consideration. We know, now, that even the most successful policies or legal or other-dispositions are never enough to respond adequately to human sufferings. Such interventions are often indispensable in situations where repressive laws, practices and institutions are obviously discriminating against the people, but they are not able, alone, to address the real questions. For the ends to reach are elsewhere. True and genuine changes start and take shape in the inner world of the actors concerned. They are eventually defined by the ways all and sundry perceive their reality and in the wisdom they acquire in taking the right decisions, for themselves and for the communities of which they are a part.

What continues to attract me, in the Swadhyaya discourse, is the central place it reserves to the "God within," in other words, to all those "divine" attributes within everyone, which prompt him or her to gain true freedom, to mature spiritually, and to build new and elevating types of relationships with others. I was particularly gratified to find out that, for Dadaji, the notion of the God within is not linked to any institutionalized religion, but is rather informed by the concept of the *Atman,* the "higher self," that "Truth within us" which is deeply entrenched in vedic beliefs. "When we realize the universal Self in us," says the Upanishads, "when and what, anybody may fear or worship?"

A prayer, in lieu of conclusion

Whenever I reach the end of a journey into Swadhyaya territory, I cannot stop being amazed by the number of things accomplished everywhere, without any help from outside, and accomplishment which would have given any "development" agency the highest international award for cost-effectiveness and productivity. There is no doubt for me that such achievements would not have been possible without the rediscovery of the "God within," or the spiritual dimension of human endeavors. Yet, my personal interest in Swadhyaya continues to be elsewhere. From what I have seen, particularly in the villages, it has brought to ordinary human beings a new sense of dignity, a different meaning of the self. It has helped them rediscover new ethical dimensions to their individual and social questions. Strangely enough, the great, spectacular festivities to which foreign guests are invited are not the best occasions to discover these deeper aspects of Swadhyaya's work. Neither can the use of "modern" media, designed to impress the participants, convey Swadhyaya's more interesting messages. Sometimes the printed or the audiovisual material prepared to this effect do the opposite job. That is why I feel sometimes penalized rather than honored, whenever the obligation to attend these extraordinary events prevents me from paying my small and private visits to the great little swadhyayees I have known—and continue to discover—in their own villages and homes. I wish I could have lived longer among them to make sure that what they have all so beautifully started is taking them where the "God within" wants to take them.

Not able to do so, I pray that the fears I expressed earlier will not go beyond the boundaries of my personal thoughts. At the same time, I confess that they sometimes bring up to the surface strange feelings of anxiety emerging from the deepest layers of my mind, something similar to what one feels at the sight of a beautiful baby thrown into a cruel and unpredictable world. I say to myself: God bless the parents who produced this divine creature. I pray that they continue to give it the compassionate care it calls for. Yet I cannot help feeling worried for its future. The concern

could respond to real facts. But it could also be ill-founded. It may quite well be that the "God within me" has not yet introduced me to his inner world of miracles. Or that my perception of reality is still affected by the many wounds inflicted on the generation to which I belong. Or that the "Westernized intellectual" in me unconsciously refuses to accept that there are totally different, yet more relevant, ways of doing things: ways that are not necessarily wrong because they do not fit one's own idea of "rationality."

I could conclude on a thoughtful remark made by a philosopher friend of mine, a born dissident, and yet a brilliant mind well acquainted with Swadhyaya, when I asked him to comment on all these questions. "It is too successful a story for me to offer any constructive view on it!" Yet, I feel that that would not be enough. Instead, let us all continue to pray and hope that, through the rediscovery of the divine within us, we all participate in the quest for a different type of change where the outer would no longer be separated from the inner.

Notes

1. "Swadhyaya: The unknown, the peaceful, the silent yet singing Revolution of India," first published in *IFDA Dossier,* January/April 1990, No. 75/76, pp. 19-34.

Swadhyaya: Personal and Communal Transformation Through Self-Study

Betty Miller Unterberger

My observations are based not only upon my visit to India for Human Dignity Day and the celebration of Dada's seventy-fifth birthday, but also on two previous visits. One was in 1986 when I came as an international guest to the Tirthraj Milan, the first international conference held to discuss the Swadhyaya work. My second visit was in the winter of 1988-89 when I brought a group of some thirty observers and scholars to see what I had come to regard as one of the most important development experiments going on in our world today. In each of these visits I had the opportunity to participate in great conferences at which hundreds of thousands of people were involved, as well as to go to the Swadhyaya villages and visit with individuals from all walks of life, see them in their home environments, and talk to them about their Swadhyaya experiences. As an historian I was profoundly impressed, even awed, by both aspects of my visits to India. I knew that no one since the days of Gandhi or Nehru had been able to bring out such tremendous numbers of people from all strata of society to participate in gatherings, which, in contrast to the earlier examples of social movements, were completely non-political and

solely devoted to demonstrating in speech and song the tremendous impact that both Dada and Swadhyaya had had on their lives. In the villages the spirit of devotion and cooperation that imbued the activities and relationships of the villagers of different castes and classes was a joy to behold.

Radhakrishnan once wrote that "historical writing is a creative activity. It is different from historical research. By the latter, we acquire a knowledge of the facts in their proper succession, the raw material. It is the task of historical writing to understand these facts and give us a feel of the past, communicate to us the vibration of life. This requires knowledge as well as sensibility." The work "at best will be a personal interpretation and not an impersonal survey."[1] Radhakrishnan's views on historical writing are very much a part of my thinking as I write this paper because it is the product not only of historical research, but also of profound personal experiences.

The heart and soul of the Swadhyaya movement and, in my judgment, the reasons for its success, is its emphasis on that spiritual truth, actually implicit in all religions, that there is a divine spark which resides within all persons,[2] which when realized provides them with the strength, the sustenance, the inspiration to take command of their own lives. But there is more, and that is that recognizing one's own divinity leads to an awareness and recognition of that same divinity in all other human beings. Once that knowledge, that truth, is ingrained in the human being they become transformed. They begin to see each other as part of one great family (the Swadhyaya parivar). Thus, it inspires a new kind of cooperation based upon a divine relationship. Moreover, it engenders the view that God or divinity is everywhere present in all living things, and therefore all must be treated with respect and devotion. The result is a reverence not only for human life, but also for plant and animal life, as well as for the earth itself. One sees this in the way in which the villagers meet one another as well as visitors, and also in the reverence with which they till the soil, plant trees, and work with their animals. What has resulted is nothing less than a spiritual revolution which has inspired an increased

awareness of God within and a spirit of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-reliance.

The inspiration for the Swadhyaya movement is Dada. His example and model of love and devotion to all persons regardless of caste, class, race, religion, or ethnic origin has been the source of the amazing development and spread of the Swadhyaya work. Patience and trust were primary attributes of the work. It took many years for Dada and the early swadhyayees initially committed to the work to convince the villagers that they were genuinely interested in them as members of the same human family, and eager to establish a loving relationship with them.

Bhaktipheri, or devotional visits, are the main pillar of Swadhyaya. That swadhyayees give of their time, even their vacation time, to go on bhaktipheri visits to establish caring relationships with persons in other villages and even in other areas of the world is remarkable. It is these visits and the kind of enthusiasm which has been generated as a result of many years of such effort that has produced the rapid spread of Swadhyaya, not only in India, but also in the United States, Kenya, Canada, Great Britain, and more recently in areas where American swadhyayees have gone, such as the Fiji Islands and Trinidad. What is even more unusual is that these people have given their time in a spirit of worship and service to God at their own expense.

Dada's message is one of ego transcendence and self-transformation through self-study, a message which emphasizes self-discovery as the key to the realization of one's communal responsibilities in a divine universal family. This is the foundation from which a series of additional revolutions have evolved. These are psychological, social, economic and political, all stemming then from this renewed spirit of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-reliance.

Swadhyaya has inspired a psychological or emotional revolution which has united people in heart-to-heart and mind-to-mind cooperation resulting in a self-generated commitment to an enhanced quality of life. When I returned from my first visit to India, one of the first and lasting impressions I noted was the commitment that people in the Swadhyaya villages had to personal

hygiene. One saw this in the cleanliness of their person and their dress, of the cleanliness and neatness within their villages, and this extended in all aspects to the entire village and to the children as well. Physicians at various villages spoke of the way in which their approach to their patients had changed once they began treating them with love as family members. The result has been fewer health problems than in non-Swadhyaya villages. This enhanced quality of life is also apparent in a renewed practice of ancient handicrafts and arts, as in hand-painting, weaving and native dances. I was privileged to see examples of their handicrafts in the villages, as well as the most colorful and graceful native dances performed in traditional costumes by the villagers themselves and even the children. One sees this also in the Bal Samskar Kendras where the virtues of life are imparted to the children and in the Behna Kendras, the sister centers, where women meet in the afternoon to learn and to help each other in developing themselves. The results are readily seen in the poise and self-confidence of the women we met in the villages both in private conversation and in public discussion. This is also provided in the DBTs or the Divine Brain Trusts, which are discussion centers for the youth where philosophical, religious, and psychological topics are debated and discussed. To visit at the Tattvajnana Vidyapith with the young people who study the basic books on vedic culture and philosophy as well as Western philosophy, grammar, dialectics, and other branches of Sanskrit literature, is both a spiritual and an intellectual delight. The swadhyayees also have an institution which promotes and organizes cultural activities and plans for community celebration of festivals. It is a pleasure to observe these joyous and colorful activities. They also have a sports club named Dhananjay Kendra, where they promote a variety of games and sports. One of my former students who had the opportunity of visiting the Swadhyaya villages and participating in various of their activities came home speaking of what fun it was to participate in these sports with other young people.

The social revolution inspired by Swadhyaya has brought about changed behavior: e.g. caste barriers have been swept away, and

thievery, gambling, child- and wife abuse, and social customs such as oppressive dowries have stopped. I was deeply moved by the numerous conversations I had with villagers, and persons of various castes and classes who told me graphically of how their lives had changed as a result of Swadhyaya. The swadhyayees have rejected dowries and expensive wedding ceremonies. In the past, such dowries could exhaust up to a third of the family's income. And expenses for weddings could cost thousands of rupees. In Swadhyaya, however, dowries have been abolished and mass wedding ceremonies (in which over a hundred Swadhyaya families may share the expense of a single wedding) have been introduced. These cultural practices that cost so much hard-earned money have thus been largely eliminated by Swadhyaya.

In an earlier visit, I was able to attend a youth rally of some one hundred thousand vaghris, one of the most backward, neglected and downtrodden communities of Gujarat, and witness the way in which Swadhyaya had inspired their self-esteem and awareness of the divinity that resided within them. The effort to learn and to recite from memory the *Trikal Sandhya* (prayers given in the morning on arising, before each meal, and when retiring for the night) has been a key to developing this continued awareness on the part of the swadhyayees of what their true nature is as they see themselves as walking and talking temples of the Lord. I was deeply impressed as I talked with numbers of these young people and also witnessed their tremendous enthusiasm and commitment.

These observations were more strongly confirmed by the knowledge on our recent visits to India that five hundred thousand untouchables had, over the course of the last few years, been visited by swadhyayees, become committed participants in the self-study program, and had memorized the *Trikal Sandhya.* Now they were attending the functions of Human Dignity Day in a devoted and moving demonstration of the way in which this work had totally changed their lives.

The Swadhyaya economic revolution has resulted in villagers working together to create impersonal wealth which is used to help the needy. This is most visible in the Yogeshwar krushis, the

Vrkshamandirs, and the Matsyagandhas. To hear the villagers and fishermen discuss their work and to see the joyous attitude with which they do their work exemplifies their view that work is worship. That one's efficiency should be offered to God in a spirit of devotion and reverence. Moreover, these efforts result in addressing and solving the problem of capital accumulation, which is so important an aspect of development programs and which has failed so dismally in most foreign aid projects.

The various Swadhyaya projects themselves result in the acquisition of surplus capital. The primary economic projects of Swadhyaya are focused on individual villages in which at least sixty percent of the population is actively involved in Swadhyaya. These thousands of villages, which participate in the Yogeshwar krushi project, for example, produce a surplus. The Yogeshwar krushi is a communal plot of land in which villagers, as part of their bhakti, or devotion to God, work to produce a crop which they sell for cash. The cash is then used to help the needy in the village, or to make capital improvements that benefit everyone in the village, or to purchase land or other necessities needed to get another individual started in his or her own enterprise. For example, in one Swadhyaya village, ten families had been given "seed" money to start farms. Of these, seven were successful. In this same village, one man had received funds for a badly needed insecticide pump.

The Matsyagandhas use their surplus in a manner similar to that of the agricultural villages. Other more recent projects have gone beyond the village level to incorporate the productive devotion of many neighboring villages. These are the Vrkshamandirs. These projects involve from twelve to twenty villages each. In these projects, as much as forty to fifty acres (usually wasteland) is leased from the government or a private source, and is made arable. The villagers then work at the project for one twenty-four-hour period each season. The produce from these projects (fruit in the case of the Vrkshamandirs and various agricultural products from the collective agricultural villages called the Shree darshanams) is then sold and the money is used by Swadhyaya as a whole. Oftentimes, this money is used for large-scale projects such as drought relief.

These projects are unlike other communal farming systems that have been attempted elsewhere in the world. The difference is mainly one of motivation. While the motivation of communal workers in the rest of the world is to gain from the communal output, the swadhyayee who works in these projects is doing so only to show his/her devotion to God. It is in this way that truly "impersonal wealth" is created—wealth that can be distributed without alienating its producers.

A second way in which capital accumulation is produced in Swadhyaya is through the transformation of the subsistence economy into an economy in which growth can occur. This is done through the efficient use of resources by the village and the individual. Those living in Swadhyaya villages have modified their habits regarding the making and spending of money. Previous to the acceptance of Swadhyaya by a family, much of the family's income might be squandered on liquor or gambling. Apparently, this was particularly true of the vaghris communities. After Swadhyaya has been put into practice, these expenditures cease. Similarly, the substitution of mass wedding ceremonies for individual weddings and the abolition of dowries has also eliminated ancient cultural barriers to savings.

The Swadhyaya political revolution has brought villagers together in meetings to discuss issues and create solutions to common problems in a democratic decision making process. The Amritalayams (hut temples) are not only places of worship, but also meeting places where the villagers discuss and work on solutions for their common problems. I was particularly struck by the way in which one village had solved their water problem. They did not have the funds to put a water line to all homes in the village. Rather than limit the water lines only to those families who could pay the necessary cost, they agreed that each family would pay in accordance to their means—some paying a thousand rupees, others a hundred thousand, so that the cost was spread over the whole village, and all would have water. This is only one illustration of the way in which this work has brought about an unprecedented change in village life in India, creating what appears to be a basic

transformation of human beings. Swadhyaya has become a dynamic progressive social force which is rapidly increasing its adherents.

How Swadhyaya as an experiment in social and development construction will fare in the future remains to be seen. What it forcefully suggests, however, is that economic and material activities need not be the center of life's stage; that indeed they must be treated as infrastructural to the pursuit of higher life purposes; that the pursuit of economic goals need not dominate and distort human existence if the idea of the unity of all persons is accepted as an authentic category of human conscience; and that it is possible for communities suffering from acute disorganization to successfully launch the process of self- and social transformation based on self-study. Self-study, which may ignite the process of ego transcendence, requires a central organizing principle and a regulative perspective. For Swadhyaya, it is the path of devotion, just as in Gandhi's sarvodaya it was service. But yet it must be noted that Swadhyaya, though beginning with the path of devotion, also includes the paths of knowledge and service as well.

Among the distinguished scholars who were present for the celebration of Human Dignity Day there was considerable discussion about the ways in which the Swadhyaya experiments might be replicated in other societies. It is easy to dismiss Swadhyaya as an experience unique to India and incapable of being replicated elsewhere, particularly in the West. Yet the scope and spread of Swadhyaya make it of immense potential importance and it seems to have remarkable success in addressing the causes of the global crises at its roots. For example, it directly attacks the materialism of the worldview in the West by reasserting the essential spiritual quality of human nature. It overcomes poverty by bringing about increased production, but without enlisting the greedy, self-serving incentives of the Western economic system, which has so many problems of its own. It establishes a new, harmonious and reverential relationship between people and nature. It involves a fraternity/sorority among all people that transcends distinctions of class, creed, caste, etc. which has, it seems, already been efficacious in the resolution of communal violence in swadhyayee villages.

Swadhyaya appeals to and works directly on the individual self. It seeks personal transformation as the basis of communal solidarity and ecological awareness, and roots this transformation every bit as deeply as the subconscious appeal of the Western worldview. This approach does seem to have a real chance of long-term success in establishing a new impulse and motivation for activity and development that fosters mutuality, cooperation and care for the unfortunate rather than the jungle ethics of Western competition. Nevertheless, despite the "desirability of universalizing the value commitments inherent in Swadhyaya, we cannot hope that realization of these values will take a universal shape."[3] Every community will have to find a concrete path implicit in its own milieu—social, cultural, political, etc.—to realize these values.

Notes

1. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "Fragments of a Confession" in Paul Arthur Schlipp, *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan,* (New York, 1952), 11.

2. For confirmation of this view see Frithj of Schuon, *The Transcedent Unity of All Religions* (Wheaton, Ill, 1984); Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York, 1986).

3. Paul Ekins, *To a New World Order: Grassroots Movements for Global Change* (New York, 1992)

On Transformation

Björn Hettne

Introduction

Swadhyaya is basically about transformation, a key concept not only in the field of International Political Economy, where the author comes from and where we try to understand global transformation, but also in the Swadhyaya movement, where the focus is on inner transformation. The distinction is by no means unproblematic.[1] By external transformation I refer to changes carried out by the help of large-scale political structures, whereas internal refers to the Swadhyaya principle of taking command over one's own destiny by the cultivation of self-respect. External and internal transformations are of course related, but perhaps in ways which are too hard to grasp for social scientists. The reflections below emanate from my encounter with the Swadhyaya approach, particularly the question which happened to be addressed to myself at the "sports stadium seminar," where thousands of people enthusiastically responded to the replies of Indian and foreign social scientists participating in the birthday celebrations of Dadaji in Bombay in December 1994.

The question for me to reflect upon and provide an answer to was whether I, as a specialist on development theory, could see any third alternative to the state and the market in the development process. Of course, I immediately thought of the impressive Swadhyaya projects in Gujarat that we had been visiting, and in particular I thought of the proud and confident faces of the swadhyayees as they were watching Dadaji's triumphant tour through Bombay. The concept that occurred to me was "civil society," and the question I asked myself was whether civil society could withstand the disruptions of global transformation and the breakdown of societies characterizing the current world scene. The question has not left me since then; I have continued to reflect upon it, and what follows is still only a partial reply.

Globalization

The process of external transformation is sometimes called globalization. Globalism can be defined as programmatic globalization, the vision of a borderless world. As a process, globalization indicates a qualitative change in the internalization process. In spite of very concrete manifestations of globalization, the contemporary concern with phenomena such as "interdependence," "world order" or the "global system" is to a large extent a cognitive phenomenon, i.e., it is a matter of how the world is conceived. I see globalization as a qualitatively new phenomenon. If globalization simply implies an observed tendency towards a global social system, its origins may be traced far back in history, but one could also argue that the process reached a new stage in the post-Second World War era. The subjective sense of geographical distance is dramatically changed; some even speak of "the end of geography." Also in ecological terms the world is commonly experienced as one. Economic interdependence has been made possible by the relative political stability of the American world order, which lasted from the end of the Second World War until the late 60s or early 70s.

The political control of the economic process was abandoned as part of the hegemonic role of neoliberalism. Globalization in this latter period, which can be seen as true globalization, is therefore

conceived as contradictory and "turbulent." It represents the ultimate manifestation of a post-Westphalian logic. It coincides with the neoliberal doctrine, and is typically articulating the interests of strong economic actors, the big players on the global market, but asserting, in a universalized language, the values of efficiency and competitiveness against corruption and mismanagement, described as "rent-seeking" behavior in neoclassical economistic terminology.

Black holes

The structure of the international system is a fundamental transformation, lifting the overlay of stabilizing controls that formed part of the Cold War system. The resulting conflicts are internal and constitute challenges to the nation-state and thereby also the nation-state system, or what could be called the Westphalian system. By that is implied an interstate system constituted by sovereign states and the particular political logic that typically characterizes a nation-state. The outside world is conceived as anarchy. Necessarily, there is a particular political rationality underlying this system, a Westphalian rationality that takes the nation-state as the given guarantee for security as well as for welfare. The turbulence and uncertainties many people experience today comes with the realization that this guarantee can no longer be taken for granted. There is in some areas even a regression to pre-Westphalian forms of security and survival strategies, such as feudal decentralization, warlords, robber bands etc.

Post-Westphalian rationality, on the other hand, would assume that the nation-state has lost its usefulness, and that solution to problems of security and welfare therefore must be found increasingly in transnational structures, either multilateral or regional. It may be correct to insist that the state has not really disappeared (very few institutions in fact disappear), but at the same time both the capacity of the state as an actor and the principle of state sovereignty have changed as to make the role of the state in the coming post-Westphalian era qualitatively different from its role in the Westphalian era.

From where come the subnational threats against state sovereignty? We can distinguish between ethno-nationalism, resulting

from the search for new political identities and claims for increased autonomy or even separation, as the role of nation-states erodes, and micro-regionalism, resulting from the emerging economic possibilities of subnational regions to reach macro-regional and global markets and networks in a more direct way. Micro-regions are thus often linking up economically with macro-regions, bypassing the national centers, and therefore macro-regionalism and micro-regionalism form part of the same larger process. The rationality behind the process is typically post-Westphalian, although in many cases it may lead to Westphalian responses from the challenged state. The conflicts rarely result in violence, however. Ethno-national movements question the legitimacy of established nation-states in a more fundamental way, and often do so within a Westphalian logic, i.e., the creation of a new state is seen as a solution to current problems for the aspiring nation.

A third type of conflict, also often related to crises of identity, is the non-territorial law and order problems associated with anti-state or anti-society sub-group formation, what Enzensberger has called "low intensive civil wars."[2] This is the organized violence of social deprivation, alienation and frustration. The types of groups covered by this concept are many: neo-Nazi skinheads, motorbike gangs, white militia. Many of these groups are extreme rightists, but also former revolutionaries, originally arising from a Westphalian or post-Westphalian logic, are today becoming "rebels without a cause" fighting "wars without issues."[3] These latter conflicts have, to elaborate further on the terminology introduced above, a pre-Westphalian (warlord/mafia) quality, i.e., state regresses to primitive structures. The three logics may well appear at the same time, as for instance in the disintegration of former Yugoslavia.

A fourth type of conflict should also be mentioned, namely, alienated but nonviolent groups (old or new) that try to build a separate and parallel society within the existing state. Their existence certainly also signifies some kind of crisis for the nation-state, but their behavior does not generate violent conflicts.

Here we focus on the subnational level, and the first of the above-mentioned crises of identity as being perhaps the most conflict-generating and problematic from the perspective of regional

security and international peace. Early examples of the dissolution of state-formations are few (one of them being Bangladesh) and tended to confirm the persistence of the Westphalian system. The world-system did not permit "national liberation" when decolonization (in which the new hegemony had an interest) was supposed to be over and done with. States are irreversibly challenged from within, and become what Richard Falk has called "black holes" or "pathological anarchies."

Civil society

To understand how (rather than why) a society breaks down, we must understand what makes it peaceful, or even what makes society possible. Since modern society took shape, this question has been asked and discussed in terms of "civil society." In fact this debate seems to be intensified when there is a sense of crisis and imminent breakdown.[4] Civil society historically refers to the modern society emerging from the dissolution of the pre-modern (feudal) order. The early political philosophers theorized civil society from the point of view of a pre-modern "state of nature;" subsequently, it was rather this "state of nature" which was conceived from the point of view of a functioning civil society, and accordingly colored. Thus, Thomas Hobbes' famous description of the "state of nature" (which can be compared with contemporary black holes) as "nasty, brutish and short" became a myth which served to emphasize the need for a strong authority. In other (particularly the more recent) formulations, civil society is seen as oppositional to and even incompatible with the state. This approach probably lies closer to John Locke.

I think one must recognize a symbiosis between state and civil society. Civil society needs the legal framework and the protective shield of the state, and without civil society the state is reduced to its military function. From this follows that a civil society first develops within a nation-state framework; it becomes a national civil society. Within a grouping of states with stable and peaceful relations over a longer period of time (the Nordic group of countries would be an example) there may emerge a regional civil society transcending the nation-states, and in a stable hegemonic world

order one may also be able to identify an embryonic "international civil society," but as yet very fragile.

A simple model of a national civil society is a situation in which multi-cultural institutions intermediate between the state and primary groups, which can be either "primordial," by which I mean that they have a previous long existence, or more recent socially constructed subcultures. They can also be territorial, class-based, etc. Thus civil society is by definition open and inclusive (although voluntary) and facilitates communication between all groups constituting a national (civic) system. Anybody may participate, although everybody does not have to. The role of the state is to provide the legal framework and guarantee the safety and security of transactions throughout the society.

A process of erosion can thus be understood as a transfer of loyalties from national civil society to primary groups, due to increasing insecurity and uncertainties. A breakdown of organized political life and inter-group social communication within a particular society (here defined and delineated by the nation-state), creates a situation in which each group becomes responsible for its own security and therefore often turns violent out of fear. This may lead to regional security crises, as has been demonstrated by Bosnia in Europe, Cambodia in South East Asia, Lebanon in the Middle East, Liberia in West Africa, Nagorno-Karabakh in former Soviet Union, and Sri Lanka in South Asia.

All but two of twenty-three peace keeping missions between 1988 and 1993 can be said to be related to internal conflicts. One reason is the new face of war. Ethnic cleansing, mass rape, systematic killing of children, destruction of cultural monuments of great symbolic value are some of the methods used. Security against payment is organized in small-scale, personalized ("feudal"), overlapping and competing clusters. Like pre-modern wars, the war as such has become a way of accumulation ("primitive accumulation"), and to secure access to scarce natural resources formally under state control.

The language of internal war is also changing, as when rebellious Mohawk Indians in Montreal describe their controversy with Quebec and Canadian authorities (concerning the building of a golf course on Indian burial grounds) in terms of war between two

independent nations, and when the killings that go on between motorbike gangs in Scandinavia is justified in terms of tribal warfare, which state authorities should abstain from intervening in. These groups are explicitly retreating (they may say that they have been thrown out or never allowed in) from "civil society," and that makes people scared, because the point in civil society is precisely to minimize scare. This is not to say that the examples mentioned are the most frightening. Obviously there is a gap between the degree of socialization of civil values and the degree of organized state power, revealed in many barbaric ways as state power declines, including the behavior of the state itself.

Social movements

At the Swadhyaya workshop which took place in a college hall, I made some comparisons with the concept of the "Great Transformation" of Karl Polanyi (I had just participated in the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of his influential book with the same title) and the Swadhyaya activities, which certainly deserve to be called transformative.

Karl Polanyi argued that societies which are completely dominated by the market principle, implying that also land, capital and labor have been commodified, is a recent historical phenomenon. Two other income mechanisms played an important role in earlier western economic history as well as in non-Western cultures: reciprocity and redistribution. The former concept refers to the socially embedded forms of exchange in small-scale symmetric communities: the latter refers to politically determined distribution in stratified societies marked by a center-periphery structure. Both modes of distribution were critically undermined by the increasing prevalence of market exchange. However, as the market principle came to penetrate all spheres of human activity, thereby eroding traditional structures and creating social turmoil, redistribution had to be reinvented in order to provide displaced people with the necessary social protection. Polanyi called this phase of market expansion followed by another phase of reaction on the part of society the "double movement." Protectionism was not seen as

inherently bad, as the conventional economic wisdom of today makes it out to be. Modern society is both a result of market expansion ("the first movement") and the self-protection of society against the disruptive and destabilizing effects of the market ("the second movement").

Thus, society is transformed in accordance with double movement, so that, in its second phase, the economy tends to be re-embedded in society typically through distributive political structures. As market exchange can only be amoral, it is for the political regime to deal with the social disruptions implied in the way in which an unregulated market operates. In the Polanyi tradition, the political, redistributive logic (historically, the logic of the state) stands out as less destructive than the anarchist logic of the market itself.[5]

Against the utopian line of recreating liberal capitalism on a world scale after the Second World War, Polanyi posed his view on a more realistic line of regionalism and planning: "The new permanent pattern of world affairs is one of regional systems coexisting side by side."[6] Polanyi developed this regionalist scenario, against what he at the time feared was going to be a new hegemonic world order or "universal capitalism." His argument for a regionalized world system and a "new protectionism" is still relevant. Previously, the self-protection of society in accordance with the distributive logic was carried out by the state. The current phenomenon of regionalism could be seen as a manifestation of the second movement, the self-protection of society, on the level of the macro-region, as a social reaction against the global market expansion (globalization) which tookup momentum in the 1980s.

The potential of civil society is, due to the decline of the state, often mentioned as a means for the powerless and the poor to protect themselves. The response to globalism will thus contain other elements than distribution, i.e., the reaction of the state or the regional organization, for instance local solidarity structures based on the principle of reciprocity. There is no lack of such local activities in India, and, having this in mind, one should perhaps look for social movements rather than regional initiatives as the major reaction to globalization.

Social movements form part of the transformation as well as the confusion involved in the process. By withdrawing their support to governments they contribute to chaos, at the same time as they represent alternative political solutions, new forms of legitimacy, and new social practices. As Rob Walker has pointed out, "social movements are but mosquitoes on the evening breeze" judged from "the regal heights of state craft," but some "can have deadly effects," i.e., they sometimes have enormous impact on societies.[7] The crucial question is, of course, what kind of impact. The Swadhyaya movement, or "stream," as Dadaji prefers to call it, is inclusive not exclusive; it is not fundamentalist but reinvents vedic tradition; it does not turn away from society but transforms it. Therefore, in spite of its stance of "antipolitics," it reinvigorates "civil society," in contrast with the destructive role played by so many contemporary social movements involved in the politics of identity. As I emphasized above, there is a symbiotic relationship between state, market and civil society, implying that the quality of the state and the decency of the market are functions of the strength of civil society.

Notes

1. The problematic of "inside" versus "outside" in International Relations is dealt with in R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

2. Enzensberger, Hans Magnus, *Civil War,* London: Granta Books, 1990.

3. Theyer, N, "Rebels without a Cause," *Far Eastern Economic Review,* April 27, 1965.

4. Tester, Keith, *Civil Society,* London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

5. For this tradition see Kari Polanyi-Levitt, *The Life and Work of Karl Polanyi,* Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1990; and Marguerite Mendel and Daniel Salée (eds.), *The Legacy of Karl Polanyi, Market, State and Society at the End of the Twentieth Century,* London: Macmilllan, 1991.

6. Karl Polanyi, "Universal Capitalism or Regional Planning", The London Quarterly of World Affairs, January, 1945, p. 87.

7. R.B.J. Walker, "Social Movements/World Politics," in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies,* Vol. 23, No. 3, 1994, pp. 669-700.

The Swadhyaya Parivar: Contemporary Religious Community in the Image of Traditional Family

Daniel Gold

Visitors to Swadhyaya life can find much with which to be impressed: the efficiency of the arrangements made, the grandness of the events put on, the extent of Swadhyaya programs through social class and geographic terrain. But perhaps the most lasting impression comes from the swadhyayees themselves—not just in their enthusiasm for the movement as individuals, but in their sense of relatedness to one another, the ways in which they manage to cooperate in the structured yet affectionate ways idealized in the Indian family.

Swadhyayees draw on the family metaphor often in their discourse and organization. Indeed, they explicitly call themselves a parivar, a family—a self understanding of religious community that has long precedent in Hindu tradition. In Swadhyaya, however, the family metaphor is developed in ways different from what has been the most common norm. The differences, I think, help to reveal what is characteristic about the Swadhyaya movement and to situate it among other Hindu movements past and present.

Family metaphors and religious community, old and new In Hindu sectarian traditions emerging in pre-modern times, the idea

of spiritual family has generally derived from the concept of spiritual lineage, the transmission of spiritual power from guru to disciple. Implicit in this idea is the understanding that the guru has achieved an ultimate realization and can be viewed as a manifestation of divinity. At initiation, disciples become connected to the guru's spiritual power, often through a mantra, divine name, or instruction in some specific religious practice. By becoming absorbed into the spiritual power that comes through the guru, disciples can also realize the divine. Perfect disciples, who have thus realized the divine, may also inherit their guru's authority and continue lineage. Depending on the type of tradition, the origin of the lineage may be found in a particular holy person of the past, or may be lost in the origins of time—with Shiva, say, taken as the originator of the lineage. In either case, the living guru is seen as the crucial link in a wider spiritual family: giving a spiritual seed to his disciple, the guru himself is taken as his or her spiritual father; within a group of disciples, people regularly refer to one another as guru brothers and sisters; and in an extended lineage, reference may be made to "uncle-gurus"—chacha gurus. From the idea of guru-disciple relationship, then, a broad sense of family-relatedness can emerge among past and present members of the lineage. Nevertheless, the primary relationship of the disciple is with the living guru, who carries the burden of the disciples' past actions, and through whom the disciple seeks salvation.[1]

This notion of the guru as personal savior, however, is not one stressed in the Swadhyaya movement. To be sure, the movement's founder—Sri Pandurang Athavale Shastri, called Dadaji—remains its revered leader. His person is given great respect and his public talks are extraordinarily valued. But Dadaji consciously rejects the role of the guru in the sense outlined above. When asked whether he thought of himself as a guru, he told me that he didn't, adding with a smile that he "didn't want the guru's burden" of having to lead disciples toward salvation.[2] Indeed, both Dadaji' s religious lineage and his role as head of a religious family are of another order.

While not taken as a link in a chain of salvation-giving gurus, Dadaji nevertheless continues an established lineage of teachers. By

birth a Brahmin, and thus with a heritage of Sanskritic learning, he has for five decades been a guiding force at the Srimad Bhagvad Gita Pathshala in Bombay, a school started by his father, Sri Vaijanath Shastri Athavale, in 1926. The Swadhyaya movement has grown as a development of Dadaji's teaching mission, and Dadaji's discourses, live or recorded, remain the focal point of most public Swadhyaya assemblies.[3] The name "Swadhyaya" itself, which means self-study, reflects the identity of the movement as a teaching—not a transmission, as found in guru-disciple lineages. As self-study, moreover, it prompts people to turn to their own resources, not to look for grace from a spiritual elder.

The primary family metaphor, then, is not that of father to child but of brotherhood among all members. While the most frequent meaning of the term "Dadaji" is "paternal grandfather," it can also mean older brother—and this is the significance swadhyayees most often attribute to it when referring to Dadaji. Similarly, Dadaji's niece and adopted daughter, who speaks with authority in the movement, is known as Didiji, elder sister, and long-time members with positions of particular responsibility are known as mota bhais, a more common term for "older brother." Certainly, Dadaji is charismatic and is perceived by many of his followers as an inspired personality. Nevertheless, he is presented not as a living manifestation of the divine, but as the first among elders, the head of a spiritual family. Compared to most older sectarian lineages, there is less stress on the relationship between guru and disciple than on the relationships among the members of the groups and the coherence of the community that has emerged.

The central teachings of the movement reinforce the importance it gives to community. The prime textual focus of the school and in the movement has been the Bhagawad Gita, a classical text with a long history of commentaries, which since the nineteenth century has been acclaimed as an encapsulation of Hindu tradition particularly suitable for the contemporary world. This suitability is seen to derive in good part from the Gita's synthesis of many earlier paths of salvation around devoted service to the Lord. The Gita, then, becomes the exemplary scripture of works, presenting

a path appropriate to the busy life most people lead today. While Dadaji has presented a number of specific ways in which contemporary Hindus can meaningfully appropriate aspects of their sacred traditions, most are imbued with the Gita's attitude of work as devoted service. And much more than individual salvation, religiously motivated work entails relationships with others in the community. Much of practical Swadhyaya efforts, then, go toward building and strengthening community, toward making the Swadhyaya family grow and flourish.

A growing family

The phenomenal growth of Swadhyaya over the last decades has been driven in good part by expansionary activities enjoined on serious adherents of the movement. Fully committed devotees are expected to spend fifteen days a year introducing Swadhyaya to newcomers in an activity called bhaktipheri, "devotional rounds." Originally, bhaktipheri entailed a movement from city to countryside, with educated Bombay swadhyayees travelling into villages. As Swadhyaya strengthened in rural areas, intervillage movement also began; and among swadhyayees abroad bhaktipheri is sooner a suburb-to-suburb affair. Vast networks of swadhyayees have thus emerged in a number of areas in India and among communities of Indians abroad—each with its own local concerns and interests but all also oriented toward Dadaji and his continuing teaching activities in Bombay. With the movement in a continuing state of growth, assimilation of the teachings and commitment to the larger Swadhyaya community can vary greatly among different individuals and groups.

Two regular features of initial interaction are especially indicative of Swadhyaya's appeal as an extended spiritual family. The first is a feature of the swadhyayee's initial approach to people he meets on bhaktipheri—which is normally through an emphasis on human community, not Swadhyaya teaching. Recently committed swadhyayees, given instruction in bhaktipheri before their first outing, are told to stress their fraternal relationship to the villagers.

In practice, swadhyayees on bhaktipheri are likely to share some linguistic or regional commonalities with those whom they meet, but they also point out that all human beings are fellow children of God, that we "are all of the same blood." The second is a feature of response by those approached. Among the first teachings given to those responding to initial contacts are interpretations of the inward significance of many everyday rituals performed by most Hindus. The traditional eleventh-day fast, for example, is explained as a time when the eleven elements of the human personality (the five sense-organs, five motor-organs, and mind) are to be offered up to God; similarly, true pilgrimage is said to occur when one can detach the mind from the everyday problems of life.[4] It is teachings like these that a great many committed swadhyayees now remember as particularly crucial in sparking their enthusiasm for the movement. Both villagers and city dwellers say that the explanations made the rituals that they grew up with more meaningful for them. For rural folk, this might mean making rituals they had done unthinkingly anyway seem more immediately significant; for educated urban classes, who may have largely abandoned the rituals, their meaningful interpretations gave them a renewed appreciation of their Hindu heritage.

Thus, successful bhaktipheri begins with a personal relationship among individuals and moves, by means of a revitalized experience of tradition, to a revaluation of the broader Hindu world. People active in the movement seem to realize that much of what is immediately attractive about it is to be found less in its teachings than in the sense of community it offers. This larger Swadhyaya community, moreover, has a number of intersecting dimensions: personal, familial, human, and Hindu—with specific projects drawing on local populations of mixed religious identity. Swadhyaya thus presents itself as an expanding network of members bound by different sorts of ties.

At the network's core are a group of senior swadhyayees based in Bombay. The seeds of developing regional configurations are already evident here. Dadaji and his family, together with a number of important devotees, are Maharashtrian—but the majority

are from Bombay's large Gujarati speaking community. The tradition has correspondingly spread most vitally in Gujarat with Maharashtra second. Maintaining some strength in Rajasthan, Swadhyaya loses numbers quickly as it moves into the Northern plains. Since the teachings of the movement are largely drawn from classical Sanskrit sources popular throughout India, the current distribution of the movement seems to depend more on regional community than regional culture: people have moved out first to those with whom they were acquainted in areas they considered their own. This pattern is particularly evident among Swadhyaya communities outside India—where with increasing exceptions, the movement is predominantly a Gujarati phenomenon. People are drawn into Swadhyaya through regional social networks already established, and bhaktipheri with strangers can begin with linguistic affinity.[5]

Almost as visible as regional configurations in Swadhyaya are ties of biological family. Relatives may understandably be drawn in by the enthusiasm of a family member for a movement that encourages group participation and presents little immediate conflict with tradition. The movement has thus spread along extended kin networks both natal and affinal. The important place of family ties within the Swadhyaya community is reinforced by the example set by Dadaji with his family, both symbolic and practical. Dadaji's wife regularly sits by his side at important Swadhyaya occasions, and Didiji is the most visible public person in the movement after Dadaji himself. Indeed, given the evident capabilities and charisma of Dadaji's niece and adopted daughter, succession to leadership in the movement will apparently follow family lines.

Experiments, community building, and devotion

Cohesion within the Swadhyaya family has been fostered by a number of "experiments"—practical projects carried out according to formulas devised by Dadaji. Most often undertaken in rural areas where Swadhyaya has a critical mass of followers, the most common is a form of collective farming called Yogeshwar krushi.

When sixty percent of a particular village is committed to Swadhyaya principles, the local members may hire or purchase land to farm together, each working on it for several days during the season. What is earned from the produce is called apaurusheya Lakshmi, "impersonal wealth," and is understood to belong to no human entity, not even the group that created it. It does, however, stay largely within the village, saved for recurring project outlays or redistributed as prasad, "divine offerings," to swadhyayees who could make efficient use of small capital investments and to anyone with an immediate emergency. A similar scheme of group labor and redistribution has been devised for Swadhyaya fishing villages. While these experiments can certainly lead to some practical benefits for the group as whole, at least as important for the group may be their role in the fostering of community. Swadhyaya English-language publications speak of how experiments create "we-feeling"[6]—a term frequently used to refer to a sense of unity within the Swadhyaya family.

The way in which experiments create we-feeling is more clearly evident in those undertaken beyond the immediate village level. Using the resources and administrative talents of the larger Swadhyaya organization, these build continuing relationships among swadhyayees from different localities. One, called Shree darshanam, "vision of prosperity," entails the restoration and cultivation of empty tracts of land by devotees from surrounding villages. Another, Vrkshamandir, "tree temple," brings urban and rural people together in reforestation projects established on the outskirts of cities. Villagers at one of the agricultural projects emphasized its role in building new personal relationships. "We are all farmers," said one, sitting in a group, "and four or five of us could do the day's work. But twenty of us have come, so we have time to rest, talk, and get to know one another."[7] Even if he was exaggerating the proportion of available labor to work, it was clear that many people came in part for an enjoyable social occasion.

More than social, however, the experience is also explicitly devotional. Since all one's skills come from God, says Dadaji, swadhyayees are enjoined to use them in the service of God as well as

themselves. The farmer offers his agricultural skills and the executive his organizational expertise. From a religious perspective, then, the experiments give devotees a structured way of committing a portion of their talents to the Lord. While the work itself may not be too burdensome either in days spent or actual labor, devotees stress the commitment with which they participate in the experiments. Workdays are allotted to members of the same village well in advance according to a cyclical rotation, and people are expected to keep to them—even in the face of minor domestic exigencies and customary social obligations like wedding invitations. Since villages participating in a project use the same cycles, the commitment to regular workdays—in addition to the priority of religious obligations over personal and social ones—helps maintain continuing relationships among specific individuals from different places. More important than the commitment to particular days, however, is the commitment to the work itself. If God helps us in all our activities, say swadhyayees, we should work for him, too, and we can do this through Swadhyaya projects. Responsibility to God is demonstrated by commitment to the Swadhyaya family, and devotion is expressed by action in community.

Religious expression is thus, for most swadhyayees, intimately tied to some explicit theistic beliefs. While it is possible in Hinduism (and other Asian religions) to emphasize the importance of proper action without a strong conception of a personal divinity, this is not the case in Swadhyaya. Swadhyayees especially cherish a figure whom they call Krishna Yogeshwar: Krishna in his role as teacher of virtuous action in the world. For swadhyayees, the world becomes both a field for devotion to the Lord and the channel through which his material graces come to devotees. As Didiji says, "If you give to a person, and you don't get back, you don't like it; but if you give to God, you will get back from Him."[8] Working for the community is giving to God, and it is reasonable to expect some return—usually indirect, through the course of one's life in the world. The centrality of this theistic attitude in Swadhyaya experiments distinguishes them qualitatively from collective projects that take selfless action toward the group as an end in itself.

Given the recent fate of Marxist societies grounded in the latter ideal, however noble, Didiji's remarks may reflect more accurately the human condition. If so, they then also suggest the vital endurance of Swadhyaya experiments where they have taken root.

At the same time, the particular, if broad, religious vision at the heart of Swadhyaya work also suggests some limits to its spread. Certainly, the perception of a benevolent divinity who receives offerings and gives material graces is not exclusive to Hindu India, and most world religions have room, at least, for individuals and groups among whom such a deity is actively cherished. But in few other countries, I think, does this perception have such a commanding place in the everyday consciousness and practice of such a high proportion of the population. In Swadhyaya this devotional attitude is personalized, intensified, and given meaning in contemporary life: let God be your co-partner in all your pursuits—be they farming, crafts, management, or high finance; you then, in turn, take part in His. Swadhyaya experiments have been effective in Indian populations who easily grasp the basic devotional presuppositions at their core. Just how far they would work in populations less regularly conversant with devotional ideas is, however, questionable. Thus, while the theistic basis of the movement may make the Swadhyaya family in theory infinitely expansible—for the Lord accepts all—the areas with the potential to put Swadhyaya experiments into effect on a large scale may be limited.

Tradition, hierarchy, and family feeling

Indeed, Swadhyaya not only draws strength from popular Hindu devotional sensibilities, but it also derives its structures of authority from traditional Hindu models. Dadaji regularly describes the aim of Swadhyaya as the restoration of the vedic way of life.[9] He thus accepts vedic authority and most of the cumulative Hindu tradition that finds its foundation in it. Yet like many twentieth-century figures, Dadaji also calls for some changes in traditions if they are to reflect accurately the true vedic path. The changes he suggests, however, are less radical than the reforms called for by some.

A good example is in his attitude toward caste. Important twentieth-century reformers before Dadaji—Swami Dayananda and Mahatma Gandhi—have thought to restore the ideal vedic social structure by revising the meaning of the four major classes of society: priests, warriors, merchants, and laborers. Instead of being determined by birth, membership in a particular class should be determined by natural aptitude, each individual doing the work best suited to him or her.[10] Clearly utopian visions, these concepts of caste were never realized on any appreciable scale. Dadaji's revision of caste is more conservative, but also more realistic in terms of both contemporary sensibilities and the current social order. Dadaji accepts the significance of birth-caste, pointing to the relevance of training from childhood in developing a particular expertise.[11] More emphatic in his public remarks, however, is a repeated assertion that all work is equally good, and that no one should think of themselves as better or worse than anyone else. Although when merely stated as doctrine, this invocation of basic human equality can sound like a mild rationalization for established social hierarchy, it in fact plays a powerful role in Dadaji's public rhetoric. When, addressing a very large gathering, Dadaji regularly exhorts high castes not to have a "superiority complex" and low castes not to have an "inferiority complex," his message makes a forceful impact. Some social experiments in Swadhyaya villages, moreover, have entailed intercaste dining among swadhyayees. A realistic, efficient hierarchy in the practical world is thus ideally but insistently suffused with a sense of ultimate equality among individuals.

In the organization of the Swadhyaya movement, this dynamic of practical hierarchy qualified by an inclusive "we-feeling" takes shape around a family model. As anyone who has attended a large Swadhyaya event can testify, that dynamic can lead to very efficient forms of management. Currently in a state of transition as the movement begins to look to a future beyond Dadaji's active leadership, the formal Swadhyaya organization involves a number of committees and leadership positions at international, regional, and local levels. Yet, however these structures finally emerge, they may be remarkable less in their general organizational patterns than in

the ideal forms of decision making they profess. The model is neither a military chain of command nor a democratic ballot, but sooner resembles a family council, a metaphor swadhyayees explicitly use. The head of the family, I was told, is supposed to listen to everyone's views but then himself take responsibility for a decision, which is ideally followed by all. In the case of Dadaji, there is little question that decisions are readily followed. If, at intermediate levels, serious dissensions remain, we hear little about them. Like an idealized Hindu family, Swadhyaya attempts to resolve internal disputes privately.

The dynamic of efficient hierarchy and we-feeling created within the Swadhyaya family sometimes seems to build on itself exponentially. This is most dramatically evident in the extremely large gatherings that swadhyayees regularly stage at the inauguration of large projects and, for the last several years, on the "human dignity days" held at the time of Dadaji's birthday. These may bring hundreds of thousands—sometimes more than a million—devotees together for a visually arresting program of group dance or drill followed by an address from Dadaji. The logistics involved in arranging such an event smoothly testify to Swadhyaya management skills. Like the engineers of the enormous Jaina or Buddhist sculptures or the architects of South Indian temple-complexes or great European cathedrals, Swadhyaya organizers have succeeded in monumental projects that suggest an extraordinary presence. But while those lasting structures evoke something transcendent and eternal, the temporary, if recurring, Swadhyaya assemblies suggest a presence much more immanent and active. Participating in a great Swadhyaya gathering entails feeling part of something very, very vast—a movement of extraordinarily large dimensions.

Thus, perhaps the major religious effect of these events lies in the development of we-feeling: among the many involved in the organization of the event; among the even more, often youthful, participants in the staged productions; and among the vast numbers in the audience. Certainly, the large numbers involved in putting on the event can feel united in a common purpose. More important, perhaps, is the way in which they, together with the

multitudes in the audience, can experience themselves as part of a community that seems almost without limits, a great Swadhyaya family that merges with a common humanity.

Complementing this very broad expanse of we-feeling—a family affection necessarily generalized and rarefied to include potentially everyone—is an evocation of immediate parent-child affection at a very central place in Swadhyaya devotion. Alongside a particular image of Krishna Yogeshwar—two-armed, adult, astride a globe of the world—swadhyayees also especially cherish an image of Shiva's consort Parvati with baby Ganesh on her lap. Krishna, Parvati, and Ganesh are all popular divinities but are here presented in uncommon ways. Dadaji envisioned and commissioned both the images, which—together with a more conventional image of Shiva—stand in the Swadhyaya temple at Tattvajnana Vidyapith outside Bombay and are found in photos in Swadhyaya homes. The image of Krishna seems clearly intended to evoke the ideal of devotional action central to Swadhyaya, but I was puzzled about that of Parvati and Ganesh. I had occasionally seen Ganesh, the elephant-headed deity, depicted as a child before, but couldn't ever recall seeing him as a little toddler sitting in his mother's lap. When I asked Dadaji about the significance of the image, his reply was immediate: "Ma lila," the divine play of mother and child.[12] The image, then, seems designed in part to evoke wholesome family affection and transform it into a pervasive devotional mood. Family feeling thus suffuses the movement in many dimensions—moving inward into the immediate realm of parents and children and outward to the great numbers of brothers and sisters in the swadhyayee world.

Religious revitalization, not religious nationalism

The twentieth century has seen the emergence of a number of Hindu movements that employ family metaphor to emphasize not a guru-disciple lineage as in pre-modern times, but an extended kinship network. The most visible of these are Hindu nationalist groups: the same term parivar, "family," used by the Swadhyaya to

refer to themselves is also regularly used to refer to a network of organizations linked under the aegis of the RSS, one of the oldest, and probably the best established, Hindu Nationalist organizations.[13] Indeed the RSS itself, combining patterns of authority centralized under a charismatic leader with strong local support, presents some organizational similarities to Swadhyaya. But these similarities in organizational structures and family idiom, I think, reflect their common development within contemporary Indian society, not a common agenda. Both successful movements, they have found shapes and language appropriate to their shared milieu. At the present juncture, however, it is important to recognize their differences.

In explicitly attempting to restore the vedic way of life and in fact helping Hindus become better engaged with their traditions, Swadhyaya can aptly be called a movement of Hindu revitalization.[14] However, it adds an ethos of devotional service, which is universal in scope, to an appreciation of traditions meaningful largely for people of Hindu heritage. Krishna is ideally a savior for everyone and his general message of selfless action is indeed significant for many in the contemporary world. To the extent that they find divinity in Krishna, swadhyayees see their relatedness in a common humanity that potentially embraces all: "We are all of the same blood." This is not the same bond of unity prevalent in Hindu Nationalist groups, where the Hindu Nation is necessarily defined against "other" nations. Thus, while Swadhyaya in fact appeals largely to Hindus, it in principle lets others participate in its activities while preserving their own differences. This is perhaps most evident in villages with large Swadhyaya populations and active community projects, which may include non-Hindus. These villages sometimes support the construction of Swadhyaya houses of worship that also serving as general meeting places for the group. Called Amritalayams, "abodes of the immortal," these are supposed to be simple and open for people of all religious communities to worship in their own manner.

In theory infinitely expansible, Swadhyaya has indeed attracted several admirers from outside the subcontinent. But the movement's

deep roots in Hindu tradition are likely to make these sooner the exception than the rule. At the same time, its potential for growth within India, and among Hindus abroad, seems, at present, phenomenal. For Swadhyaya has drawn from the broader Sanskritic Hindu stream in ways that have flourished in Maharashtra and Gujarat, the two most industrialized states in India. With its ethic of selfless, but efficient, service, Swadhyaya may have a particular appeal to the contemporary entrepreneurial ethos prevalent in these industrialized areas—and also often found among Indians who have ventured abroad. While perhaps now concentrated most intensely in Western India, this contemporary ethos seems to be spreading quickly throughout the subcontinent. And with it Swadhyaya zeal, fostered by conscious expansionary efforts, may well spread too. In encouraging the best impulses of an entrepreneurial spirit, developing we-feeling between urban and rural populations, and—perhaps most important—revitalizing Hindu religious tradition without invoking Hindu nationalism, Swadhyaya may have a very important role to play in twenty-first century India.

Notes

1. For an extended discussion of guru-disciple lineages in pre-modern Indian religions see Daniel Gold, *The Lord as Guru: Hindi Sants in North Indian Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

2. Interview with Dadaji, December 21,1994, Bombay.

3. See John T. Little, "Video Vachana: Swadhyaya and Sacred Tapes," in *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia,* ed. Laurence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 254-281.

4. *The Systems,* (Bombay: Sat Vichar Darshan Trust, 1994), pp, 30,42. As with most Swadhyaya publications based on the teachings of Dadaji, this one has no named author.

5. See Little.

6. See *Systems,* p. 119.

7. Interview at Rajkot Amritalayam, December 16, 1994.

8. Remarks at Rajkot Amritalayam, December 16, 1994.

9. See *Systems,* ch. 2.

10. On early twentieth-century attempts to deal with caste, see Daniel Gold "Organized Hinduisms: From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation" in *Fundamentalism Observed,* ed. Martin E. Marty, and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 551-555.

11. Interview with Dadaji, December 21, 1994, Bombay.

12. Conversation with Dadaji, December 25, 1994, Ahmedabad.

13. For an analytic description of the RSS see Gold, "Organized Hinduisms."

14. See Little's analysis in "Video Vachanas," where the term was first applied to the movement.

Swadhyaya: A Search for Relationship

Vidya Niwas Mishra

Some five years ago I heard about Swadhyaya and became curious to know what it is. What I had heard was unbelievable. Ramashray Roy, a friend, talked about it. I requested him to write an article, which was later published in the *Nav Bharat Times,* which I was editing at that time. Despite the depth of the article, I was still skeptical. Some time later, I was invited by another friend, Rajiv Vora, to visit areas where Swadhyaya has taken root. I visited a village near Vadodara and talked to young boys and girls to learn what they had got out of Swadhyaya, and how. These discussions were not between an observer and the observed, nor were they to form a historian's listing of information. They were between two participants at two levels. The talk itself was so refreshing and showed so much involvement that I was at once transformed. I always felt that India is a country which moves only with the sense of a continual being. In other words, for us, to be born or brought up in the Indian tradition is essential to our every action, our every thought and even our speech. This means that the present moment, here and now, is the most important thing for us and it is the focal point or the reference point to comprehend reality. Unless we have a

continual feeling of the presence of the divine in us or around us, our actions are more likely to be tainted with a false sense of ego. When we visualize the presence of the divine in us, then that ego easily merges in All-being. When I heard the dalit (the lowest in caste hierarchy) women talking with great confidence and acting with humility, I could not help but feel that they had been transformed into a sense of relatedness to the All-being. This relatedness breeds love, giving oneself fully to the other, and making oneself completely identified with the other, shedding off all selfishness and all limitations.

My experience in that village was as if I had entered into a new world, so different was it from the so-much illuminated world of dissent, doubts, hatred and meaningless violence. When I entered their houses and perceived for myself the change in the internal arrangement and in their attitude towards a visitor, I was struck with a new sense of purpose in life. Later I had many dialogues with the swadhyayee people and a closer dialogue with Dadaji, Pandurang Shastri Athavale. In my earlier dialogues with Swadhyaya workers, I could sense that they were lacking in openness. But Dadaji is an open-ended spirit. He is so humble and acts so confidently that he radiates immediately an openness and surrender. Surrender is not enslaving oneself to some other entity. Surrender is relating oneself in totality or in All-ness. This realization is not merely through the process of that surrender but also through action, so that the visualization is activization of the divine in oneself. Dadaji does not claim to give an ultimate answer or to have brought changes in society. He merely claims that he has been involving himself in experiments, one after the other, in doing things with a divine purpose.

When we compare Dadaji's attitude towards bringing a new purpose in life to the officially-sponsored social change, we find that there is a world of difference. The failure of cooperative movements as well as of community development programs is evidence of the fact that these programs lacked sincerity and lacked a divine purpose. They could not generate desired changes. Sincerity emanates from a divine makeup of the mind. In other words, the

action is sincere and more deeply involved after one is able to relate oneself to the sense of All-ness. One is more cautious and at the same time more likely to be efficient. Only the best thing is likely to be offered to the All-being represented by an *avatar* (incarnation) through some symbol. This offering makes the work an instrument of joy. This was clearly evident from Vrkshamandir (the tree-temples), which were nourished with love and with a feeling that this is a part of offering to the divinity. I saw that four-year-old trees were bearing fruits, although grown in almost arid tracts of land. This has happened because the swadhyayees nourish these trees as if they were actualizing the divinity in them. The tree is not only an abode of a divinity, it is also a manifestation of the divinity. The labor involved in this activity is not the same kind of labor which is used in an employer-employee situation. It is a labor of love. This love is not self-expansion; it is a complete giving for a fuller realization of the self.

Dadaji does not claim to do something new. He has merely channeled our fountain sources to meet demands of time and space. He has expanded the meaning of our traditional rituals. For example, what he calls *Trikal Sandhya* is an extension of the meaning of sandhya. It starts with recalling one's relationship with the divinity, one's place on this earth. It evolves into a sense of enjoyment of food and of material gains as if it were an enjoyment on behalf of the All-being and in this way it is a nourishment in a better sense of the word. It is nourishment of the All in one. Finally, it translates into a sense of peace with oneself through a day full of meaningful endeavor. Its sense of peace is brought out by total surrender of a narrow "I-ness." Similarly, for Dadaji, *ekadasi* means apportioning a part of one's life by way of offering a day's earning, or spending a day in active persuasion, moving from house to house at one's own cost, or by way of participating in collective activity for the well being of all. This ekadasi is an expansion of the idea of fasting or refraining from food once every fortnight. For Dadaji, vedic sacrifice is not offering at an altar, it is enlightened action for the purpose of bringing harmony between man and man, and between man and nature.

Thus Dadaji is only experimenting with the potential of bhakti, the path of devotion. His is the pioneer experiment and he is always seeking suggestions to improve the technique of experimenting. However, he is not experimenting with objects. On the contrary, he is experimenting with the subject, the subjective in every man. He is trying to subjectify the objects so that a better relationship is established between so-called object and subject. During my discussion with Dadaji, I raised the question of whether the success of the experiment is partly due to the fervor of devotion and whether this experiment could be extended to areas where scepticism prevails. Dadaji answered that reinforced endeavor is needed in such difficult situations and for that purpose perseverance and calmness is needed. This could entail a more rigorous discipline of mind, a deeper understanding of the *"swa"*—selfness. After all what is *"swa"* and what is *"adhyaya"?* It is nothing but uncovering of the pure self, dissolving infinite losers or gainers. It is not easy and is not done in one day. A continuous endeavor is required. Dadaji for this reason does not accept any contribution from people who have not joined Swadhyaya and who have not continuously participated in its activities for several years.

Dadaji is practical and rational and simple. The combination of all these three qualities also make him enigmatic; all of them existing simultaneously in one person seems almost an impossibility. I asked Dadaji whether the whole venture could collapse in his absence. Dadaji replied by saying that he has provided for a collective judgement through a process of using several filters starting from the grass-roots level to the summit level.

I have another apprehension, that is, it may fall into the trap of personality cult. My apprehension is not so much from the behavior of the swadhyayees, because they have been trained in the understanding that every action is on behalf of Yogeshwar, the Lord of the Commune. Through participation in such divine commune, the merging of different "I's" into "we" has become possible. Also, "they" turn into "we." This inclusive attitude is something to which an average educated mind is not easily attuned. An average educated mind thinks only in terms of individual and individuality.

That individual is conspicuously absent in the illiterate—though orally educated—mind, which has no difficulty in shedding a superimposed sense of individuality, and which does not comprehend any sense of privacy. I have an apprehension about the literate and so-called modern people. When I talked to some special people deeply involved in the Swadhyaya experiment I could sense their inability to identify with the All-principal. I could also sense that they have a notion that Dadaji is giving the ultimate answer, which I suppose he is not. On the contrary, Dadaji's own preference is for an open-ended discussion, but a discussion is not unrelated to action. In other words, he is trying to discuss not only the foundation but also the implementing processes. In this sense, he is practical and is able to transcend his own ideas experimenting with the potentials of life principle. He wants to go beyond the special dimensions of his land, his people and his way of living and experiment with alien situations. This is a formidable task.

Nevertheless, if we continue to think on these lines, there starts a change in our attitude, toward not only this global village, but also toward the entire cosmos. This attitude is very much desirable universally. Swadhyaya, as I learned from even a one-time dialogue, is not a finished product. It is a process of regeneration of the life-principle, which can be summed up in just three words: unity, continuity and interdependence.

Swadhyaya: An Answer to a Modern Predicament[1]

Suma Varughese

We are five years away from the Millennium. As the world hurtles with ever increasing momentum towards that fateful moment, history seems to be preparing to turn the page to yet another chapter in our civilization. The signs are clear for all to see. A way of life based on a set of premises postulated three hundred and fifty years ago is today collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions.

The Industrial Revolution ushered in the Age of Reason. Nothing not open to reason was admissible, claimed Descartes. Matter consisted of atoms, chimed Newton. Man was born of apes, asserted Darwin. God was banished, nature vanquished. Progress continued apace. Capitalism arose, and man was reduced to a factor of production. To counter that, along came communism. Only to transfer power to the state, leaving man as shackled as before. Gradually, inevitably, man lost his sense of worth. And his existing alienation with nature and God, was compounded by his alienation with himself.

Today, we are reaping the harvest of this alienation, as the world explodes around us in a cacophony of disharmony. Tastes have

degenerated all around. Dissension and discord have ripped to shreds the fabric of our society. AIDS and cancer are rampant. Communism is dead; although capitalism is racing through the world like a broncobuster, it is ravaging the earth and setting the agenda for our own destruction. We are sick. Manifestly sick. The good earth is weary and so are we. That there is a better way to live.

Who can restore our self-respect, and our links with existence? Who can envisage and create a new world order? Could there possibly be a man of such transcendental vision and wisdom? Of courage and determination? Of organizational and administrative capability? A man, so to speak, for the times?

Awesomely enough, there is one.

A seventy-five-year-old Sanskrit scholar and philosopher. A teacher and practitioner of the Bhagawad Gita, and the founder of one of today's most regenerative and powerful movements, Swadhyaya.

His name is Pandurang Shastri Athavale. Doesn't ring a bell? No matter. Few of the westernized elite have heard of him. Or of Swadhyaya. Yet like an underground river nursing its strength before bursting into the surface like a mighty torrent, the Swadhyaya (study of self) movement has been quietly and steadily gathering momentum. Today, it has a huge following of over three million people, spread over one hundred thousand villages in India. Its influence is rapidly spreading in the U.S., U.K., South Africa, Mauritius, the Fiji Islands, nourished by the zeal of expatriate Indians fired by its glowing ideals. Its network of educational institutions is influencing the hearts and minds of millions of the new generation. Its galaxy of unique socioeconomic experiments have proved that economic parity can prevail without loss of private initiative. But best of all, its inspiring message of universal brotherhood under the fatherhood of God is restoring and renewing human links.

In a world where greed and hunger, anger and hatred, despair and decay, have never before orchestrated themselves into such a strident pitch, the Swadhyaya movement is like a patch of verdant green grass in the desert wasteland of the twentieth century.

Hear fisherman Pandarinath Bhavan Meher on the subject:

> At eleven days after my birth, parents taught me to drink. And so I grew up—drinking and fighting. Then I attended Dadaji's discourses. And he told me that God was within me. After that, I was uncomfortable with the thought of drinking. In 1986, I went to a teerthraj milan after which I completely stopped drinking. We have a fisherman's festival called Gutter amavasya (new moon), so named because you are supposed to drink until you fall into a gutter. When my friends came to celebrate it with me, they could not believe that I had stopped. My friends today are in hospitals. Dadaji has given me so much. Today, my health is intact, and the money spent on drinks is intact. I have the respect of society. If I hadn't met Dadaji, I would have been in the gutter too. When I told my wife I was leaving drink, she hugged me. I can never forget that.

Or take the case of Kamlakar Budha, a fisherman hailing from the village of Maroli, Daman. His boat had recently capsized and destroyed, an unmitigated tragedy to one for whom it represents not just his only wealth, but also his only source of livelihood. What saved him from destitution and despair was the unique Swadhyaya experiment of creating Impersonal Wealth. Based on the principle that gratitude to the Creator is best expressed by offering efficiency, the concept finds expression among the fishing communities in pooling together enough funds to buy a common boat, which since it belongs to none, is designated as God's, and called a Matsyagandha (floating temple). Each member of the community takes turns to ply the craft and the money realized by selling the catch is considered to be God's wealth, which is then distributed among those in need, like Kamlakar Budha, as prasad, a term that cleanses it of the ugly connotations of charity.

In Budha's case, given the large amount of the sum (two hundred thousand rupees) it was a loan, but a loan with nothing written down, and with no repayment deadline, or interest attached.

These are just two examples of the transformation wrought by the Swadhyaya movement, one on the individual front and the

other on the systemic. Both highlight the love of God that is the central thrust of the movement, and its aim to transform mankind.

But how has religion become such a powerful social force? And on what basis had Dadaji accessed to us the power of transforming ourselves?

Swadhyaya is based on the philosophy of the Bhagawad Gita, whose central precept of an indwelling God is the fulcrum around which the movement rotates. *Tat twam asi* (That thou art) and *Aham-brahma-asmi* (I am divine) are the twin principles of the vedanta on which the Swadhyaya movement is founded.

The logic on which Dadaji bases his philosophy is as follows:

- God exists.
- God exists within me.
- That makes me divine and worthy of self-respect.
- That makes others divine and worthy of respect.
- Since God exists, and exists within me, it follows that God also exists within the whole universe. Everything in the universe is therefore divine and to be reverenced.
- This means that my attitude towards myself, others and the universe is one of respect and reverence.
- It also means I am related to everything in the Universe by virtue of having a common creator.
- The above two points motivate me to care for the welfare of others, for I am related to them. And respect preempts me from damaging them in any way.
- Over and above this, the central reality of my existence is God, and my only aim in life is to realize the God within me. How may I do that? Through the three vedic paths of jnana, bhakti and karma. Jnana is the path of knowledge or self-study (Swadhyaya) which indicates not only introspection but knowing the self through knowing others.
- Bhakti is an understanding of God's nearness to me and my relation to Him. Such an awareness fills me with love and gratitude to Him for looking after my welfare, and motivates me to do something for him, which is to look after His universe.

- The path of self-realization through karma lies in selfless action, when one does one's duty with no consideration for profit or loss.
- All three paths to self-realization, therefore, lead me towards humanity and the universe, which motivates me once again to have its welfare at heart.

In Dadaji's scheme of things, therefore, contradictions do not exist. The spiritual and the material aspects of life are perfectly welded, as are individual and collective welfare. His vision of man is that of a perfectly integrated being, who is linked through bonds of respect, devotion and brotherhood to himself, to others and to the universe. Such a man has confidence and self-respect. His awareness of divinity fills him with heroism, courage and the determination to live life to the fullest. His ideals are noble and unfaltering, for he never loses sight of his ultimate aim of self-realization. And his commitment to the welfare of humanity and the universe is unshakeable. Such a man not only leads a joyful, full, successful and noble life, he does so through helping others realize it. He is also highly rational. For his self-respect frees his mind of slavery and enables him to discriminate good from bad.

Says Dadaji: "My effort is to create a new man who pursues the divine mission in which God is at the center."

It follows that a society of such perfectly integrated individuals will itself become completely integrated. Since individual welfare is linked to collective welfare, conflicts and divisions arising out of the ego will gradually be sublimated. The common concept of divinity in all humanity will highlight the invalidity of differences based on sex, color, caste, community, religion or class. The issue of women's liberation, for instance, is completely annihilated, for women are as divine as men, and that is the end of that. Similarly, every imbalance within society is capable of being corrected when viewed from the focal point of Swadhyaya philosophy.

Indeed, the manifest aim of the movement is to effect a total transformation of society on economic, political, social, emotional and spiritual levels.

Money as a motivation and source of self-esteem will cease to have such a central hold on a society geared towards the far higher aim of self-realization. At the same time, the crippling divide between the rich and the poor will naturally narrow, because the poor, restored of their self-esteem and self-worth, will be much more self-reliant and determined to vanquish poverty, as well as less vulnerable to the vices of smoking, alcohol or gambling. The rich, on the other hand, will realize, as Dadaji puts it, "Since God is with us and within us, He is, to use the language of business, a partner in all our transactions. Naturally, He must have His share."

That share, God's share, Dada suggests, could be a source to redistribute wealth.

Indeed the economic aspect of the world order visualized by Dadaji is among the most fascinating of his contributions, for he has conceptualized and realized a number of experiments that integrate capitalism's rewards and acknowledgment of private initiative with communism's compassion for the have-nots.

The two most striking aspects of the philosophy are its emphasis on self-respect and volition. Says Dadaji:

> Any philosophy of life or system of society that destroys my individuality and individual initiative is not acceptable to me. Each person must have self-respect. He or she must respect himself or herself.

With his unerring knowledge of human nature, Dadaji picked out the single most important motivating force in our lives, a sense of self-worth, and rooted it into the one factor all humanity has in common: The presence of God. As he wisely remarks, "It is self-respect that pushes man towards virtues and away from vices." It is self-respect that gives a man individuality and integrity, and enables him to relate to others on terms of equality. In short, self-respect is the cornerstone of a value-based active life.

Yet, because it is derived from a the common presence of God, self-respect does not flair out into aggressive individuality that has no consideration for the others' welfare.

Volition, based on the premise of self-respect, is what distinguishes this movement from other more rigid charters of belief that have no room for evolutionary growth nor for individual points of view.

Though Dada has been teaching from the Bhagawad Gita for the last fifty-three years, the impetus for creating the Swadhyaya movement can be said to have come about in 1954. Invited to the second World Religious Congress held in Japan in 1954, Dadaji read out a paper proving that the philosophy behind the Bhagawad Gita was the perfect solution to modern societal problems.

Impressed, the assembled members wanted to know if there was any village or group in India that lived according to these precepts. The words came as a galvanic shock to Dadaji, as he shook his head regretfully. Thereafter, his mission was clear, and although he was tempted with offers in the Western academic world, he returned home, and to his regular discourse at the Srimad Bhagvad Gita Pathshala, that his father had set up in C.P. Tank, Bombay. From among the devotees, he selected nineteen, and for the next two years he worked on them rigorously, impressing them with the truth and practice of his philosophy.

The denouement, which is a crucial part of Swadhyaya history, took place one evening in the year 1957. As usual, his group of nineteen waited at Juhu beach for him to come, but this time, the Dada they saw was a man consumed with anguish at what he could see was the degeneration of man. Communism's growing impetus even within the villages had stung him into an awareness of the danger approaching society, and the need for counteracting measures. The path was clear.

Religion was under fire, destroyed by the blind rituals and shibboleths that centuries of practice had turned it into, and by the revulsion of modern youth to its irrationality. The nineteen devotees must go into villages setting the record straight and releasing the faith from its distortions:

> Young swadhyayees like you who have studied and understood the divine thoughts of the Vedas, the Upanishads and

> the Gita, have a great moral responsibility. You must be prepared to defend our ancient and noble religion and culture. You must tell the people the real meaning of devotion, religion and spiritualism.

Awestruck by Dadaji's fervor and conviction, the nineteen listened as he went on:

> To rejuvenate human values, and to restore religion and culture to their true grandeur, is true service to God. It is a form of devotion. Devotion should not be limited to temple worship, rites and rituals, singing and chanting only. This crude faith shall drown us in oceans of ignorance; and man shall be degraded to a beastly, sensual existence. Under such conditions, if young people like you who have studied the Upanishads and the Gita sit quietly and do nothing, you will be guilty of neglecting your duty. Neither society, nor history, nor God will ever forgive this lapse on your part. Therefore, you must go to the villages. This too is a form of devotion.

With these words Dadaji transformed the private and individual nature of the Bhagawad Gita's aim to attain God-consciousness into an instrument of social activism. As he often says, Swadhyaya is an example of bhakti used as a social force.

The chain of actions initiated by that revelationary outburst in 1957 culminated in what is a key factor in Swadhyaya activities, the bhaktipheri, or devotional tour.

Using the argument that gratitude to God for inhabiting us and ceaselessly operating our mechanism called for an acknowledgment on our side, Dada used the traditional concept of ekadasi, or day of fast every eleventh day in a fortnight, to define the direction our gratitude could take. Instead of a passive act like fasting, however, we could use it to speak to others about God and bring them within his presence. Since single days are inadequate for the purpose, the ekadasis are clubbed into twenty-four days a year. This is a period the swadhyayee devotes to work in the villages, speaking

to its inhabitants about the love and devotion to God, and the noble precepts of the Gita. To convince them of the disinterestedness of this motive, a swadhyayee is strictly warned against asking the villagers for any favor, no matter how minor. He has to cook his own food, manage his own accommodation, spend his own money, always keeping in mind the truth that he was here for his own self-development.

The initial years were difficult as the swadhyayees worked against the odds to overcome skepticism and establish their credibility; but gradually, however, their work bore fruit. Though spread mainly in Gujarat and Maharashtra, it is taking root daily all over India, including Himachal Pradesh in North India and Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in South India, wherever a swadhyayee is inspired to take up the cause.

And wherever the movement spreads, it generates a gradual transformation within man and society. Discord and divide are replaced by brotherhood and camaraderie. Drinking, gambling and other vices hold no attraction for a populace newly aware of its divinity, and restoration of self-respect brings with it a resultant determination towards self-reliance and self-perfection. And paradoxically, the road to spiritual perfection leads to economic prosperity, and peace and happiness.

At a village in Valsad that I visited, Chibubhai Patel, one of the local swadhyayee elder brothers, whose wise little visage seems saturated with sweetness, tells me of the gradual transformation experienced by his village. "Earlier, people used to drink and eat, slap their wives, and go to sleep. Now, no one drinks." According to Patel, the village, which is wholly swadhyayee, is "Ramrajya." Bickering and disputes are a thing of the past, as the villagers awaken to an active realization of their brotherhood. Warmth and love become the currency of communication. The money once frittered away in drinking has contributed towards *pukka* (sturdy) houses for everyone, while thrift, hard work and devotion have opened the door to prosperity. Best of all, their newfound self-respect keeps

them free of the manipulation of politicians looking for electoral gain. "God has given us money. Why do we need so much?"

The awesome integrity and character behind that simple statement is a proof of the greatness of spirit that Dada has released within humanity.

Everywhere I went, I experienced that same sense of spiritual awakening, of a humanity looking and discovering within itself a nobility and self-confidence, breaking free of the slavery imposed upon them both by society and the mind. Take the case of the village women, for instance. Gradually, in that same spirit of natural evolution, women are emerging from the cloisters of their homes to devote themselves to Swadhyaya work.

Forbidden earlier from stepping out of their houses, they now perform goodwill tours, visiting neighboring villages to establish bonds of fraternity. "Dada has given us God and a new life," says one of them emotionally. One looks at the violence and discord with which women's liberation has been achieved in the educated world, and longs for a similar wisdom to enfold the world.

If I ever wish to see the Swadhyaya spirit embodied in its female avatar (incarnation/mode), I only have to recall Laxmiben Patel, a part-time pujari at a local Vrkshamandir (tree-temple). The pride and self-worth with which she uttered her name, her eyes lighting up with fire, would have done justice to a queen, even as her gnarled hands and a sturdy backbone devoted itself to the upkeep of the trees in her care. "They are my children," she exclaimed, her arms sweeping out to include the expanse of the green foliage. Such self-worth and humility, resting side by side, is the true worth of the Swadhyaya spirit; wherein all the paradoxes of human nature, softness and strength, self-esteem and care for others, is reconciled.

And with Dada's unfaltering belief in the divinity and fathomless potential of humanity, the villagers are encouraged to learn Sanskrit, while the discourses often compare the philosophy of Kant and that of Hegel! It is this unbelievable generosity of spirit and respect for every human being that makes Swadhyaya such a powerfully liberating force.

But if bhaktipheri was the foundational exercise for the dissemination of Swadhyaya, Dadaji's fertile mind and fervent determination to effect a total transformation in society has created several other unique institutions, whose purpose, as always, is to solve societal problems through the framework of devotion to God.

There is the concept of the Loknath Amritalayam, for instance, which seeks to restore the central socioeconomic role temples played in ancient India, where they were centers for community activity and a place where all members, regardless of the caste, class or economic status, could meet.

When a village begins to have a sufficient number of swadhyayees to make the venture worthwhile, a simple temple, with walls of creepers and a floor plastered with a mixture of dung and clay, is constructed. Here, all the swadhyayees meet twice a day, morning and evening, for prayers and community meetings. All major discussions are taken in the presence of God.

There is also the concept of Impersonal Wealth, earlier explained. Active in the fishing communities as Matsyagandha and in the agricultural communities as Yogeshwar krushi, the idea is to contribute one's efficiency to God. Among the agricultural communities, this concept takes the shape of leasing or buying a small property of land, with funds contributed by the whole village.

This land, belonging to none in particular, is treated as God's. Every day, the villagers take turns to till the soil, and the produce so grown is seen as God's wealth or Impersonal Wealth. This wealth is offered to God, and, through consultancy with a few elders, distributed among those most in need, not as charity, but as prasad from God. So delicate is the impulse not to offend the receiver's pride or self-respect, that its distribution is usually in the dead of night.

Among the fishing community, the concept revolves around a community fishing boat and the concept is called Matsyagandha or floating temple.

The most ambitious of these ventures, based on the involvement of twenty villages or more, is the Vrkshamandir (tree-temple), a large orchard of anything from ten and above acres. Quite apart from its value in providing a self-sufficient social umbrella, the

concept is also meant to forge bonds of friendship within the twenty villages. The idea, obviously, being to forge larger and larger concentric circle of brotherhood.

All those who work on these projects are known as part-time pujaris, for the work is seen as divine. Today, the movement has more than 3,500 Yogeshwar Krushis, 32 Matsyagandhas, 17 Vrkshamandirs and 100 Loknath Amritalayams.

Can these economic experiments be reproduced on a world scale? If man in general can be persuaded to approach life, God and humanity along the Swadhyaya line, it's really hard to figure why not. The vision is there, can man rise to the task? For all our sakes and that of the universe, it's to be fervently hoped so.

Through it all, the human spirit joyously proclaims its liberation. And with each fresh experiment and each moment, the movement only gathers in momentum. If it took fifty-three years to get this far, it is a certainty that it will take less than half that time to reach the world.

And in the center of it all, like a spider meticulously spinning its web, sits Dadaji. The evolutionary zeal that has charged his movement with such coruscating lustre, kindles in him ever-growing quantities of dynamism, commitment and compassion. His bond with his people is charged with such tender love that he just escapes being defied. Even so, hymns acknowledging his achievement are routinely sung at prayer gatherings. In appearance, he appears kindly and wise, but his features are not cast in a heroic mold. In his spotless white kurta and dhoti, he looks like nothing as much as a Maharashtrian gentleman farmer.

But his protean talents, faith in God and powerful personality were wrought in early life.

Born on October 19, 1920, to a family of Sanskrit scholars, his remarkable intellect manifested itself early. And on the advice of his then principal, Pt. Ramapati Mishra of Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskritshala, his father started a Sanskrit school for him, aimed at giving him a thorough grasp of our culture and tradition. The twelve-year course included logic and philosophy. By all accounts, the education he received under his father was the making of the

man. He was not allowed any special favor, on account of being the founder's son, and never allowed more than two pairs of clothes, which had to be mended when worn. The young lad had a mind that was deeply interested in anything from swimming to riding to driving and playing. His analytical powers were highly developed to the extent that he would take the weaker side in a debate and win hands down.

At twenty-one, he emerged from the Pathshala, with a firm determination to perpetuate Indian culture and civilization. Yet, to communicate with the western world, he needed to understand its thinking, and so he immersed himself for an additional twelve years in the Royal Asiatic Society Library in Bombay, diligently arriving when the Asiatic Library opened, and leaving only when it was time to close.

During those twelve years, his mind raced through the storehouse of Western civilization, sifting through its vast tracts of knowledge. It is said that his photographic memory was capable of retaining almost everything he read.

Even today, the swadhyayees talk in awe of his ability to remember almost every member of his flock by name, and quiz them in detail of their personal life.

His own life is Spartan. Living in a small two-bedroom flat in C.P. Tank in Central Bombay, with his wife, Nirmalatai, he has repeatedly resisted appeals to move into a flat gifted by the grateful swadhyayees.

Up every morning at 3:30 a.m., the next two and a half hours are spent in meditation. This is followed by a walk at 6:00 a.m. and by 9:00 a.m., he is available at the Swadhyaya office, Vimal Jyoti.

When in Bombay, his evenings are reserved for appointments. Every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday between 7:00 and 8:00, he discourses on the Gita in Gujarati. And Sundays between 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. are devoted to a Hindi discourse, attendance of which is one of the unbreakable conventions of the Swadhyaya family. All of Sunday, until 4:30 p.m., is given to the swadhyayees to be used not only for personal darshan (audience), but to plan out their activities.

Despite the burgeoning nature of the movement, the impeccable network of information keeps Dadaji informed of every development within it.

His is the mastermind that has plotted its every move. He is clearly its heart and soul. Will it be able to retain its sterling integrity and high ideals without him? The question is obviously of concern to the swadhyayees, who have already picked a successor, his daughter Dhanashree, popularly called Didi. Such nepotism sits oddly in a movement fired by such high ideals but Professor Bongale, a retired lecturer of philosophy, and Didi's tutor for her Ph.D., explains that Didi was the only leader acceptable to the members, and her philosophical orientation and powerful leadership qualities equip her for the task. He admits quite frankly that Didi is not another Dada, adding wryly, "But who is?"

Too many movements have floundered and died along with their founder, or worse, been corrupted and misunderstood. Keenly aware of the danger, Professor Bongale is working with Dadaji on developing a metaphysical validity for the movement, to avert that possibility. But ultimately, they take recourse in their own philosophy. If God wants Swadhyaya to continue, it will, they say wisely. And that, presumably, is the last word on the subject.

Note

1. The above article appeared earlier, in May 1995, under the title "Messiah" in *Society,* a journal published from Bombay.

Further Aspects of Human Development[1]

Paul Ekins

Swadhyaya is committed to the idea of individual transformation and empowerment through service to the divine in the world of here and now. It treats economic development as primarily a cultural rather than a technical process that engenders creativity and innovation to strengthen community sustainability.

"Swadhyaya" comes from Sanskrit and can be roughly translated as "study of the self." It is the name of a philosophy currently said to motivate into action three million people in up to 100,000 villages in India. Swadhyaya was founded and is led by a "Maharashtrian saint" of Brahmin upbringing, Pandurang Shastri Athavale, known to his followers as Dada (elder brother).

Born in 1922 into an erudite family, Dada was early immersed in philosophical studies for which he had great aptitude. In 1954 he contributed to the Second World Religion Conference in Japan and returned to India to become a preacher and teacher at the Bhagwad Gita Pathshala in Bombay. It was there that he developed his Swadhyaya approach and encouraged his students to go with him or by themselves into villages to talk with the villagers, and actions to spread the philosophy were started.

Transcending the phenomenal self, the "self" of Swadhyaya is taken as the manifestation of Divine Being. With this awareness, individual's sense of isolation and vulnerability is replaced by self-reverence and identity with others, including nature, laying the basis for a different order of social creation, mediated by the love of Divine Being.[2]

The Swadhyaya philosophy expresses itself in several different ways. There are the huge meetings addressed by Dada which can number up to half a million people. His reputation as a preacher seems, however, to be matched by that for humility and self-effacement and a very simple personal lifestyle—no tele-evangelist he.

Then there are several socioeconomic initiatives based on Swadhyaya philosophy which would seem to have done much to improve the condition of the village people, but as byproducts of their main purpose, which is the service of God and love for their fellow human beings. For example, there are over 3,500 "farms for God" averaging five acres, worked by swadhyayees, with any individual, however, only working a few days a year on any one plot. Thus they have no personal claim to the wealth produced, which belongs solely to God and which is either distributed to the needy or reinvested in more land or farming inputs. The creation of this "impersonal wealth" is also at the heart of the tree-planting enterprises of the Swadhyaya "family." Thirteen large orchards of fruit trees have so far been created, each with the involvement of at least ten villages. Their tending is regarded as an act of worship and the villagers who do so by rotation are seen as priests in the execution of sacred ritual.

As with farms and orchards, so with fishing communities on the Maharashtra and Gujarat coast. Eighteen boats have so far been built and crewed in rotation by local fishers, with the catch again being regarded as "impersonal wealth" belonging to God and distributed to the needy.

Those villages that have become most solidly involved with Swadhyaya work are encouraged to build temples for worship, simple structures of local materials and without walls where the whole village gathers to worship and offer a portion of their earnings as

God's share, in a spirit of gratefulness to Him, for the use of the needy. Also, social grievances and disputes are raised and resolved there. These temples acknowledge no distinction or discrimination between caste, class or gender. Seventy-four of these temples are now in existence in as many villages. The scope and spread of Swadhyaya make it of immense potential importance and it would seem to have a real potential for addressing the causes of the global crisis at their roots.

For example it tackles directly the materialism of the Western worldview by reasserting the essential spiritual quality of human nature; it tackles poverty by bringing about increased production but *without* enlisting the greedy, self-serving incentives of the Western economic system, which have so many problems of their own; it establishes a new, harmonious and reverential relationship between people and nature; it involves a fraternity/sorority between all people that transcends distinction of class, creed, caste, etc. which has, it seems, already been efficacious in the resolution of communal violence in swadhyayee villages. Swadhyaya appeals to and works directly on the individual self; seeks personal transformation as the basis of communal solidarity and ecological awareness; and roots this transformation every bit as deeply as the subconscious appeal of the Western worldview. This approach would seem to have a real chance of long-term success in establishing a new impulse and motivation for activity and development that foster mutuality, cooperation and care for the unfortunate rather than the jungle ethics of Western competition.

Notes

1. This article has earlier appeared in Paul Ekins, *A New World Order: Grassroots Movements for Global Change,* London and New York: Routledge, 1992

2. R.K. Srivastava, "A Short Description of Swadhyaya Movement in India," Delhi: CSDS, Mimeo, 1989

About the Authors

Paul Ekins is an internationally known ecological economist. He is currently in the department of Economics at Keele University in the United Kingdom. He is the author of a wide range of research papers and popular books on social movements, world order and environmental issues.

Daniel Gold is Professor of South Asian Religions, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. His research interests include: Hindu saint tradition, religious institutional networks in India, and South Asian religious nationalism.

Björn Hettne is Professor of Peace and Development Studies, University of Göteborg, Göthenberg, Sweden. He has written extensively on international political economy, development theory and regionalism.

Pramila Jayapal is a Fellow at the Institute of Current World Affairs. After training and working in the area of banking, marketing and management in the United States, she has involved herself

deeply in the international development field in the nonprofit sector. She specializes in societal issues in modern-day India.

Anthony Judge, an Australian, is director of communications and research at the Union of International Associations, Brussels, Belgium. As such he is responsible for a publication program that generates the Yearbook of International Organizations (four volumes) and the Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential (three volumes). His research interests include new types of organizations, and the interface between organization, information, comprehension, human development and values.

Theodore H. Koff is director of the Geriatric Studies Center at the University of Arizona, U.S.A. He has written extensively on aging, public health, and the changing character of family life.

Gopal Krishna is associated with the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, and with Wolfson College in the University of Oxford. He specializes in Islamic Studies and modern history of the Indian subcontinent.

Vidya Niwas Mishra, an eminent educator, thinker, writer and journalist, is essentially a teacher. He is a Visiting Professor at the Universities of California and Washington and a Fellow of the National Academy of Letters. He has authored over seventy books, many of which are highly acclaimed. Currently he is co-editing a multi-volume series on History of Philosophy, Culture and Science.

Majid Rahnema was a career diplomat and international civil servant. Then he opted for a vocation as a teacher and writer on poverty, development and education. He has represented Iran in Paris, Beirut and Moscow and at the U.N. He has served the U.N. system for many years in various capacities. He has held teaching positions at numerous universities including McGill, Stanford, Harvard, Berkeley, and Pennsylvania. Currently he lives in southern France.

N.R. Sheth has long been a researcher and teacher of sociology, particularly in the area of industrial relations and human resources. He has retired as the director of the prestigious Indian Institute of Management. Currently, he is engaged in a major study of Swadhyaya at the grassroots level.

Arun Shourie, who trained as an economist and worked in the World Bank, is an independent columnist. His syndicated pieces appear in English and most vernacular languages of India. He has written extensively on Indian politics and social life. He is a past recipient of the Magasaysay Award for integrity in his vocation as a journalist.

Raj K. Srivastava is on the faculty of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. His interests include social movements, development alternatives and the sociology of religions.

Betty Miller Unterberger is the Patricia and Bookman Peters Professor of History at Texas A&M University. She specializes in the history of American foreign relations, particularly relations with the erstwhile Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. She has also lectured and written widely on Swadhyaya.

Suma Varughese is a committed young journalist from India. She writes on alternative ways of looking at problems besetting India: gender, environment, consumerism, value erosion, etc.

Narendra Yamdagni is a physicist located at the University of Stockholm, Sweden. He has worked at leading research centers in the world in the area of cosmic rays, particle physics and gravitation. He is a deeply concerned Indian scientist working in Europe, and writes from that perspective.

The "weathermark" identifies this book as a production of Weatherhill, Inc., publishers of fine books on Asia and the Pacific. Book design and typography: Liz Trovato. The typeface used is Bembo. Printing and binding: Quebecor, Inc.



DADA
(Pandurang Shastri
Athavale)

When Pandurang Shastri Athavale, the driving force and founder of Swadhyaya, was presented the prestigious Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion this year, many in the West had still not heard of the great movement he had founded and nurtured in his homeland, India. Based on Vedanta philosophy, Swadhyaya literally means the study, knowledge, and discovery of the "Self." But it is not exclusively an inward journey. It is a journey to work out a unity in a multiverse of cultures and worldviews, of harmonizing "Self" with a network of relationships, of creating and maintaining vital connections between self, society, and God, of knowing and enriching human action with sacredness. In India, it is also a dynamic phenomenon that has transformed the lives of millions.

This volume brings together the views of a community of scholars and observers who have been exposed to the philosophy of Swadhyaya and its constructive work, and have encountered those who follow Swadhyaya and have absorbed it into their lives. It represents the first emergence of a scholarship on a movement that is certain to shape the future of India and the world.

New York WEATHERHILL Tokyo

ISBN 0-8348-0408-5

90000

EAN

9 780834 804081